Hanns Heinz Ewers

Alraune

Translation by

Joe E Bandel

Hanns Heinz Ewers Alraune

Joe Bandel

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This book is dedicated to my children and step-children., Lyssa, Crystal, Whitney, Dylan, Sarah and Jason. Dreams can come true. Even if it is four pages at a time. Don't ever give up! Thanks to Dr. Kugel for permissions.

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Translating Alraune

" Deine Tage sind wie die schweren Trauben blauer Glyzenen, tropfen hinab zum weichen Teppich: so schreitet mein leichter Fuss weich dahin durch die sonnenglitzernden Laubengänge deiner sanften Tage."

Your days are like the heavy (grapes/bunches/clusters) blue Glyzenen, dropping down to soft carpet: so stride my light feet softly in them through the sun glistening arbor your gentle days.

What the hell does “Glyzenen” mean? Look it up in the dictionary; it’s not there. Google it on the internet; it’s not there. Try some online German-English dictionaries; it’s not there…

What did Endore’s write? “glycinias” Well, what does that mean? Look it up in the dictionary; it’s not there. Google it on the internet; ah, there it is–Archaic German word for wisteria–not used anymore–Maybe back when he translated it some old Germans were still alive that knew the meaning of the word.

[Editor’s note. S. Guy Endore translated a 1929 version of Alraune for John Day Publishing Company]

What is “Wisteria”? Google it on the internet–Oh, what beautiful thick flowers. We don’t have those here in northern Minnesota. Now let’s get back to the translation. “Dropping down to soft carpet?” That can’t be right. Wisteria grows outside and doesn’t fall onto the carpet! When those thick blossoms fall they will form a carpet on the ground though! Let’s try it like this:

Your days are like the heavy blue clusters of wisteria dropping down to form a soft carpet. My feet stride lightly and softly through them as I enter the glittering sunlight in the arbor of your gentle days.

Just for grins lets see what Endore came up with.

“ *Your days drop out of your life even as the heavy clusters of blue glycinias shed their blossoms one by one upon the soft carpet. And I tread lightly through the long, sunny arbors of your mild existence.”*

What the hell! That’s not even close! Where did he come up with that “days dropping” and “blossoms one by one” bit? None of that is in the text at all. Obviously he was embellishing a bit. (Something that Endore did quite a bit of.)

Such was my experience with the very first page of Alraune. But it was not my last. The John Day version of Alraune turned out to be very mangled and censored to boot. There are different types of censorship and I ran into most of them. Let's take chapter five to give some brief examples.

Now in the story Alraune's father agrees to cooperate with the experiment in exchange for a couple bottles of whiskey the night before he is executed. Thus he is so drunk the next morning that they have to help him walk up to where the sentence of death is read to him. Suddenly he realizes what is about to happen, sobers up immediately, says "something" and begins to fight back. But first he utters a word–What is that word? It may give a clue to the entire incident. Let's see how it really goes:

She laughed, "No, certainly not. Well then –but reach me another slice of lemon. Thank you. Put it right there in the cup! Well then –he said, no –I can't say it."

" Highness," said the Professor with mild reproof.

She said, "You must close your eyes first."

The Privy Councilor thought, "Old monkey!" but he closed his eyes. "Now?" he asked.

She still hesitated, "I –I will say it in French –"

" That's fine, in French then!" He cried impatiently.

Then she pressed her lips together, bent forward and whispered in his ear, "Merde!"

Of course "Merde!" means "Shit!" in French. He said "Shit!", sobered up and started fighting for his life! Let's see what the John Day version did with it.

She laughed. “Of course not. How silly. Well –just let me have a piece of lemon. Thanks –put it right into the cup! –Well, then, as I was saying – but no, really, I can’t tell you.”

“ Your Highness!” the Professor said in a tone of genial reproach.

Then she said: “You’ll have to shut your eyes.”

The Councilor thought to himself, “What an old ass.” But he closed his eyes. “Well,” he asked.

But she resisted coyly. “I’ll –I’ll tell it to you in French.”

“ Very well then, Let it be –French!” he cried impatiently.

She pursed her lips, bent her head to his and whispered the offending word into his ear.

As you see, we don’t even get to know what the word was in the John Day edition and a subtle nuance has been lost. Still, you might think I am making mountains out of molehills. What difference does that little bit have to do with the story? Well let’s take a more substantial piece of censorship. Later in the same chapter almost one entire page of text has been censored. I won’t share it here because it will spoil the story but this entire section was omitted from the John Day version. Curiously enough Mahlon Blaine illustrated a portion of it which shows that he was familiar with it. It was translated but didn’t make it into the book.

Something that is also missing in the John Day edition is much of the emotional content and beauty of the writing itself. Consider this paragraph at the end of chapter five:

There is one other curious thing that remains in the story of these two people that without ever seeing each other became Alraune’s father and mother, how they were brought together in a strange manner even after their death. The Anatomy building janitor, Knoblauch, threw out the

remaining bones and tatters of flesh into a common shallow grave in the gardens of the Anatomy building. It was behind the wall where the white roses climb and grow so abundantly –

How heart wrenching and touching in its own way! Let's see how the Endore's version handles it:

Again the bodies of these two, who, though they had never seen each other, yet became Alraune ten Brinken's father and mother, were most curiously joined in still another manner after their death. Knoblauch, the old servant who cleaned out the dissecting rooms, threw the remaining bones and bits of flesh into a hastily prepared shallow ditch in the rear of the anatomy garden, back there against the wall, where the white hedge-roses grow so rankly.

When you consider that nearly every single chapter of the John Day version has been gutted of its emotional content in one way or another, it is not surprising that it never became as popular with the reading public as it did it Germany. There it could be read in its entirety as the author intended. For the first time Alraune is now available to the English speaking world in an uncensored version that brings the life and emotion back into the story. I am proud to have been able to be a part in the restoration of this classic work of horror.

A final note for those that have read the John Day version:

What I read then is different, entirely different, has different meaning and I present her again like I find her, wild, hot –like someone that is full of all passions!

Contents

Galeotto

Arsis

Chapter 1

Describes the house on the Rhine before the thought of Alraune came into the world.

Chapter Two

Expains how the idea for Alraune came about.

Chapter Three

Informs how Frank Braun persuaded the Privy Councilor to create Alraune

Chapter Four

Gives the particulars of how they found Alraune’s mother

Chapter Five

Informs about her father and how Death stood as Godfather when Alraune came to life.

Intermezzo

Chapter Six

Deals with how the child Alraune grew up.

Chapter Seven

Shares the things that occurred when Alraune was a young girl.

Chapter Eight

Details how Alraune became Mistress of the House of Brinken.

Chapter Nine

Speaks of Alraune’s lovers and what happened to them.

Chapter Ten

Describes how Wolf Gontram was put into the ground because of Alraune.

Chapter Eleven

Renders to the reader the end of the Privy Councilor through Alraune.

Intermezzo

Chapter Twelve

Gives an account of how Frank Braun stepped into Alraune’s world.

Chapter Thirteen

Mentions how Princess Wolkonski told Alraune the truth.

Chapter Fourteen

Describes how Frank Braun played with fire and how Alraune awoke.

Chapter Fifteen

Tells how Alraune lived in the park.

Chapter Sixteen

Proclaims how Alraune came to an end.

Finale

Hanns Heinz Ewers

Hanns Heinz Ewers was born in Dusseldorf Germany on 3 November 1871. Both of his parents were artists. His father was a painter and a singer. His mother was a painter and a gifted storyteller. He, himself, was a writer, poet, playwright, filmmaker and comedian.

His film, **The Student of Prague** , was the first film ever to make use of a double. His most famous novel, **Alraune** , has been translated into twenty languages and made into a film five times. He is mostly known as a horror writer in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe.

Why then have most people not heard of him?

The easy answer is that he was a strong supporter of German nationalism during the Second World War even though he was also a strong supporter of the Jewish cause as well. In the end Ewers books were banned in Nazi Germany and he died in 1943 persona non grata in poverty.

After the war his Nazi affiliation caused his literary works to be shunned and he has been largely forgotten.

This is the easy answer. The harder and more accurate answer is very complex because he was a very complex person. As I translate more of his material I will try to find more answers to the life of this very interesting person as well.

Galeotto

We read of Lancelot one

day for pleasure, how love

constrained him. We were alone

and without any suspicion

A Galeotto indeed, that book,

and he who wrote it. That day

we read no more.

Dante, The Inferno V 127

We read once–Oh, what was it, Isolde?

On a summer afternoon in the foliage of the summer house

The little book was red and the edges were gold–

A tame dove sat on your shoulder–We were entirely alone

And the carrier of the plague was the world around us.

No little breeze stirred the leaves–there we read – Was it the love

Tragedy of the couple from Rimini, run through by a spear?

Was it the dream song of Lancelot? What was it then?

–Was it the sultry heartfelt song of longing, which Echegaray wrote?

Was it Tristan’s love drunken journey on the ocean?

I don’t know what it was. Yet what clings fast in my brain

Is how you softly laid your right hand on mine, my sweet love.

And my fingers loosened your braids–That is when you looked into my eyes

And in their depths lay the magic word that was true, the right word

At the right moment. Our hearts pounded, the sun burned and our souls

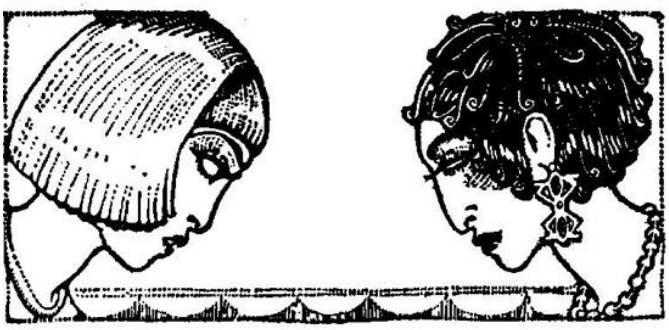
Demanded their destiny–Thick was the foliage that encircled our love.

We were entirely alone in a green tent–exiled into some fairyland of legend.

You were the Queen: I was the hero. The cupola, the Galeotto,

That made our love Possible–was the entire world!

-Hanns Heinz Ewers



Arsis

Will you deny, dear girl, that creatures can exist that are– not human – not animal – strange creatures created out of absurd thoughts and villainous desires?

You know good, my gentle girl, good is the Law; good are all our rules and regulations; good is the great God that created these regulations, these rules, these laws.

Good also is the man that values them completely and goes on his path in humility and patience in true obedience to our good God.

But there is another King that hates good. He breaks the laws and the regulations. He creates – note this well – against nature. He is bad, is evil, and evil is the man that would be like him. He is a child of Satan.

It is evil, very evil to go in and tamper with the eternal laws and with insolent hands rip them brazenly out of place.

He is happy and able to do evil – because Satan, who is a tremendous King, helps him. He wants to create out of his prideful wish and will, wants to do things that shatter all the rules, that reverse natural law and stand it on its head.

But he needs to be very careful: It is only a lie and what he creates is always lunacy and illusion. It towers up and fills the heavens – but

collapses at the last moment and falls back to bury the arrogant fool that thought it up –

His Excellency Jacob Ten Brinken, Dr. med., Ord. Professor and Counselor created a strange maiden, created her – against nature. He created her entirely alone, though the thought belonged to another.

This creature, that was baptized and named Alraune, grew up and lived as a human child. Whatever she touched turned to gold, where ever she went became filled with wild laughter.

But whoever felt her poisonous breath, screamed at the sins that stirred inside them and on the ground where her feet lightly tread grew the pale white flower of death. It struck dead anyone that was hers except Frank Braun, who first thought of her and gave her life.

It's not for you, golden sister, that I write this book. Your eyes are blue and kind. They know nothing of sins. Your days are like the heavy blue clusters of wisteria dropping down to form a soft carpet. My feet stride lightly and softly through them as I enter the glittering sunlight in the arbor of your gentle days. I don't write this book for you my golden child, gracious sister of my dream filled days –

But I write it for you, you wild sinful sister of my hot nights. When the shadows fall, when the cruel ocean devours the beautiful golden sun there flashes over the waves a swift poisonous green ray. That is Sins first quick laugh over the alarmed dying day.

That's when you extend yourself over the still water, raise yourself high and proclaim your arrival in blighted yellows, reds and deep violet colors. Your sins whisper through the deep night and vomit your pestilent breath wide throughout all the land.

And you become aware of your hot touch. You widen your eyes, lift your perky young breasts as your nostrils quiver and you spread wide your fever moistened hands.

Then the gentle civilized day splits away and falls to give birth to the serpent of the dark night. You extend yourself, sister, your wild soul, all shame, full of poison, and of torment and blood, and of kisses and desire, exultant outward in joyous abandon.

I write about you, through all the heavens and hells – sister of my sins – I write this book for you!

Chapter 1

Describes the house on the Rhine before the thought of Alraune came into the world.

THE white house in which Alraune was thought into existence existed long before she was born–long before she was even conceived. This house lay on the Rhine a little out of the city on the large Villa Street leading out to the old Archbishop's Palace where the university is today. That is where it lies and Legal Councilor Sebastian Gontram and his family once lived there.

You walk in from the street, through the long ugly garden that has never seen a gardener. You come to the house, from which stucco is falling, search for a bell and find none. You call and scream and no one comes. Finally you push the door open and go inside, climb up the dirty, never washed stair and suddenly a huge cat springs through the darkness…

Or even better–

The large garden is alive with a thousand monkeys. They are the Gontram children: Frieda, Philipp, Paulche, Emilche, Josefehe, and Wülfche. They are everywhere, in the boughs of trees, creeping through the earth in the mine pits. Then there are the hounds, two cheeky spitzes and a Bastard Fox terrier. In addition there is a dwarf pinscher that belongs to Attorney Manasse. He is quite the thing, like a brown quince sausage, round as a barrel , scarcely larger than a hand and called Cyclops.

The yard is filled with noises and screams. Wülfche, scarcely a year old, lies in a child's wagon and screams high obstinate screams for hours. Only Cyclops can beat this record and he yelps, hoarse and broken, incessantly. Wülfche never moves from his place, only screams, only howls.

The Gontram rogues are resting in the bushes late in the afternoon. Frieda, the oldest, should be looking out for them, taking care that her brothers are behaving. But she thinks they are behaving and sits under the decaying Lilac leaves with her friend, the little Princess Wolkonski.

The two chatter and argue, thinking that they soon will become fourteen years old and can get married, or at least have a lover. Right now they are both forbidden from all this and need to wait a little longer. It is still fourteen days until their first Holy Communion. Then they get long dresses, and then they will be grown up. Then they can have a lover.

She decides to become very virtuous and start going to the May devotions at church immediately. She needs to gather herself together in these days, be serious and sensible.

“–and perhaps also because Schmitz will be there,” says Frieda.

The little Princess turns up her nose, “Bah–Schmitz!”

Frieda pinches her under the arm, “–and the Bavarian, the one with the blue cap!”

Olga Wolkonski laughs, “Him? He is–all air! Frieda, you know the good boys don’t go to church.”

That is true, the good ones don’t do that. Frieda sighs. She swiftly gets up and shoves the wagon with the screaming Wülfche to the side, and steps on Cyclops who is trying to bite her ankles. No, no, the princess is right. Church is not the answer.

“Let’s stay here!” she decides. The two girls creep back under the Lilac leaves.

All the Gontram children have an infinite passion for living. They can’t say how they know but deep inside, they feel in their blood that they will die young, die fresh. They only have a small amount of time compared to what others are given and they take this time in triple, making noise, rushing, eating and drinking until they are saturated on life.

Wülfche screams in his wagon, screaming for himself alone as well as for three other babies. His brothers fly through the garden making themselves numerous, as if they were four dozen and not just four. They are dirty, red nosed and ragged, always bloody from a cut on the finger, a scraped knee or some other good scratch.

When the sun sets the Gontram rascals quietly sweep back into the house, going into the kitchen for heaping sandwiches of buttered bread laid thick with ham and sausage. The maid gives them water to drink colored lightly with red wine.

Then the maid washes them. She pulls their clothes off and sticks them in wooden tubs, takes the black soap, the hard brush and scrubs them. She scrubs them like a pair of boots and still can't get them clean. Then she sticks the wild young ones back in the tubs crying and raving and scrubs them again.

Dead tired they fall into their beds like sacks of potatoes, forgetting to be quiet. They also forget to cover up. The maid takes care of that.

Around this time Attorney Manasse comes into the house, climbs up the stairs, knocks with his cane on a few doors and receiving no answer finally moves on.

Frau. Gontram moves toward him. She is tall, almost twice the size of Herr Manasse. He is a dwarf, round as a barrel and looks exactly like his ugly dog, Cyclops. Short stubble stands out all over him, out of his cheeks, chin and lips. His nose appears in the middle, small and round like a radish. When he speaks, he barks as if he is always snapping.

"Good evening Frau Gontram," he says. "Is my colleague home yet?"

"Good evening attorney," says the tall woman. "Make yourself comfortable."

"Why isn't my colleague home yet?–and shut that kid up! I can't understand a single word you are saying."

“What?” Frau Gontram asks. Then she takes the earplugs out of her ears. “Oh yes,” she continues. “That Wülfche! You should buy a pair of these things Attorney. Then you won’t hear him.

She goes to the door and screams, “Billa, Billa–or Frieda! Can’t you hear? Make Wülfche quiet!”

She is still in apricot colored pajamas. Her enormous chestnut brown hair is half-pinned up and half-fallen down. Her black eyes appear infinitely large, wide, wide, filled with sharp cunning and scorching unholy fires. But her skeletal face curves in at the temples, her narrow nose droops and her pale cheeks spread themselves tightly over her bones. Huge patches burn lividly on–

“Do you have a good cigar attorney?” she asks.

He takes his case out angrily, almost furiously.

“How many have you already smoked today Frau Gontram?”

“Only twenty,” she laughs. “But you know the filthy things are four pennies apiece and I could use a good one for a change. Give me the thick one there! – and you take the dark, almost black Mexican.”

Herr Manasse sighs, “Now how are you doing? How long do you have?”

“Bah,” she made a rude sound. “Don’t wet yourself. How long? The other day the doctor figured about six months. But you know how precise they are in that place. He could just as well have meant two years. I’m thinking it’s not going at a gallop. It’s going at a pretty trot along with the galloping consumption.

“You shouldn’t smoke so much!” The little attorney barks.

She looks at him, her thin blue lips pulling high over gleaming teeth.

“What? What Manasse? No more smoking? Now stop with the friendly airs! What am I supposed to do? Bear children all year long? The

brats in this house already drive me crazy. That's why it's galloping–and I'm not supposed to smoke?"

She blows a thick cloud of smoke into his face and makes him cough.

He looks at her, half-poisoned, half-living, and admires her. He doesn't take anything from anyone. When he stands before the bar he never tells a joke or minces words. He barks, snaps, bites without respect or the smallest fear.–But here, before this dried up woman whose body is a skeleton, whose head grins like a death's head, who for a year and a day has stood three quarters in the grave and laughed at herself the last quarter, here he feels afraid.

Her unrestrained shimmering locks are always growing, always thicker, always fuller as if pulling nourishment from her decaying body. Her perfect gleaming teeth clamp around a cigar; her eyes are enormous, without hope, without desire, almost without awareness but burning with fire–These leave him silent. They leave him feeling smaller than he really is, almost as small as his hound.

Oh, he is very educated, Attorney Manasse is. She calls him a veritable conversational encyclopedia. It doesn't matter what the topic of conversation, he can give the information in the blink of an eye.

Now he's thinking, has she given up on finding a cure? Is she in denial? Does she think that if she ignores death he will not come? Does she think death is not in this house? That when he does come, only then will she go?

But he, Manasse, sees very well that death is here even though she still lives. He has been here all along hiding throughout the house, playing blind cow with this woman that wears his face, letting her abandon her numerous children to cry and race in the garden.

Death doesn't gallop. He goes at a pretty trot. She has that right. But only out of humor, only because he wants to make a joke, to play with this woman and her life hungry children like a cat plays with the fish in a fish bowl.

Only this woman, Frau Gontram, thinks he is not even here. She lies on the lounge all day long smoking big dark cigars, reading never-ending books and wearing earplugs so she can’t hear the noise her children make– He is not here at all?–Not here?

Manasse sees very well that Death is here

Death grins and laughs out of her withered mask, puffs thick smoke into his face. Little Manasse sees him perfectly enough. He stares at him, considers for a long time which great artist has painted this death. Is it Durer? Or Bocklin? Or some other wild harlequin death from Bosch, Breughel or a different insane, inexcusable death from Hogarth, from Goya, from Rowlandson, Rops or Callot?

It is from none of these. Sitting before him is a real death, a death you can willingly go with. It is a good, proper and therefore romantic Rhinelander's death. It is one you can talk with, that sees the comedy in life, that smokes, drinks wine and laughs. It is good that he smokes thought Manasse, so very good, then you can't smell him–

Then Legal Councilor Gontram comes into the room.

"Good evening colleague," he says. "Here already? That's good."

He begins a long story about all that has happened during the day at the office and before the court. Purely remarkable things that only happen to lawyers once in a lifetime happen to Herr Gontram every day. These strange and often lusty occurrences are sometimes comic, often bloody and highly tragic.

Not a word is true. The Legal Councilor has an incurable shyness of telling the truth. Before his morning bath, yes, even before he washes his face in the basin, from the moment his mouth first opens wide he lies. When he sleeps, he dreams up new lies. Everyone knows that he lies, but his stories are so lusty and interesting they want to hear them anyway. Even when they aren't that good they are still entertaining.

He is in his late forties with a short, very sparse beard and thinning hair. A gold pince-nez with a long black cord always hangs crookedly over his nose and helps his blue shortsighted eyes see to read.

He is untidy, disorderly, unwashed, and always has ink spots on his fingers. He is a bad jurist and very much against doing any work, always supervising his junior lawyers but not doing anything himself. On this basis he oversees the office managers and clerks and is often not seen for weeks at a time. When he is there, he sleeps. If he is awake, once in awhile he writes a short sentence that reads, "Denied" and stamps the words "Legal Councilor" underneath.

Nevertheless he has a very good practice, much better than the knowledgeable and shrewd Manasse. He understands the language of the people and can chat with them. He is popular with all the judges and

lawyers because he never makes any problems and all his clients walk. For the accused and for the jury he is worth the gold he is paid, you can believe that.

Once a Public Prosecutor said, “I ask the accused be denied extenuating circumstances, Legal Councilor Gontram is defending him.”

Extenuating circumstances, his clients always get them, but Manasse seldom receives them despite his scholarly ways and sharp speeches.

There is still more, Legal Councilor Gontram had a couple of big, important and provocative cases that created sensations throughout the land. In both cases he fought through the entire year and finally won. These cases suddenly awoke in him a strange energy that up until then had lain sleeping inside of him.

The first was so full of tangles, a six times loser, nearly impossible case that went from lawyer to lawyer, a case with complicated international questions that he had no suspicion of when he took it. He just thought it was interesting and liked it.

The Koschen brothers out of Lennep had been condemned to death three times. In a fourth resumption he continued on and won their freedom despite hair splitting circumstantial evidence.

The other was a big million-dollar dispute over Galmeiberg Mfg. from Neutral-Moresnet that every jurist in three countries knew about. Certainly Gontram at the least had fought through to the very end and obtained a victorious verdict.

Since then for three years he handles all the legal casework for Princess Wolkonski. Remarkably, this man never says a word about it, about what he really does. Instead he fills the ears of those he meets with lies, cheeky inventions of his legal heroics. Not a single syllable comes over his lips of the real events of his day. This makes it seem like he detests all truth.

Frau Gontram says, “Dinner is just about ready and I’ve already set out a bowl of fresh Woodruff salad. Should I go get dressed?”

“Stay the way you are woman,” the Legal Councilor decides. “Manasse won’t mind–” he interrupts himself, “Dear God, how that child screams! Can’t you hold him?”

She goes past him with long, slow strides, opens the door to the antechamber where the maid has pushed the child’s wagon. She takes Wülfche, carries him in and sits him in a highchair.

“No wonder he screams,” she says. He’s completely wet.”

But she does nothing about it, leaving him to dry out by himself.

Be still, you little devil,” she continues. “Can’t you see I have company?”

But Wülfche is determined to disturb the entire visit. Manasse stands up, pats him, strokes his chubby back, and brings him a Jack-in-the-box to play with. The child pushes the Jack-in-the-box away, bellows and screams incessantly. Cyclops accompanies him from under the table.

Then Mama says, “Now wait, sugar drop. I have something for you.”

She takes the chewed black cigar stub from out between her teeth and shoves it into the baby’s mouth.

“There Wülfche, how do you like that? Well?”

The child becomes still in the blink of an eye, sucking, pulling and beams, overjoyed, out of huge laughing eyes.

“Now attorney, you see how you must deal with children?” says the tall woman. She speaks confidently and quietly, completely earnest.

“But you men don’t understand anything at all about children.”

The maid comes and announces that dinner is ready. While the others are going into the dining room she goes with unsteady steps up to the child.

“Bah,” she says and rips the cigar stub out of his mouth. Immediately Wülfche starts to howl again. She takes him up, rocks him back and forth and sings him a melancholy lullaby from her Wolloonian homeland in Belgium.

She doesn’t have any more luck than Herr Manasse. The child just screams and screams. She takes the cigar stub again, spits on it and rubs it against her dirty apron to make sure the fire is completely out and puts it back in Wülfche’s red mouth.

Then she takes the child, washes him, changes him, and tucks him into bed. Wülfche never stirs, lies quiet still and contented. Then he falls asleep, beaming blissfully, the ghastly black cigar stub always in his lips.

Oh yes, she was right, this tall woman. She understands children, at least Gontram children.

During the dinner and into the evening they eat and the Legal Councilor talks. They drink a light wine from the Ruwer. Frau Gontram finishes first and brings the spiced wine.

Her husband sniffs critically.

“I want champagne,” he says.

She sets the spiced wine on the table anyway. “We don’t have any more champagne. All that’s left in the cellar is a bottle of Pommery.”

He looks intently at her over his spectacles, shakes his head dubiously.

“Now you know you are a housewife! We have no champagne and you don’t say a word about it? What? No, champagne in the house! Fetch the bottle of Pommery– Spiced wine is not good enough.”

He shakes his head back and forth, “No champagne. Imagine that!” He repeats. “We must procure some right away. Come woman; bring my quill

and paper. I must write the princess.

But when the paper is set in front of him, he pushes it away again. He sighs.

“I’ve been working all day long. You write woman, I’ll dictate to you.”

Frau Gontram doesn’t move. Write? She’s a complete failure at writing!

“I can’t,” she says.

The Legal Councilor looks over at Manasse.

“See how it is, Colleague? Can’t she do this for me? I am so exhausted–”

The little Attorney looks straight at him.

“Exhausted? He mocks, “From what? Telling stories? I would like to know why your fingers always have ink on them, Legal Councilor. I know it’s not from writing!”

Frau Gontram laughs. “Oh Manasse, that’s from last Christmas when he had to sign as witness to the children’s bad behavior!–Anyway, why quarrel? Let Frieda write.”

She cries out the window to Frieda. Frieda comes into the room and Olga Wolkonski comes with her.

“So nice to have you here,” the Legal Councilor greets her. Have you already eaten this evening?”

Both girls have eaten down in the kitchen.

“Sit here Frieda,” bids her father. “Right here.”

Frieda obeys.

“Now, take the quill and write what I tell you.”

But Frieda is a true Gontram child. She hates to write. Instantly she springs up out of the chair.

“No, no,” she cries. “Olga should write, she is so much better than I am.”

The princess stays on the sofa. She doesn’t want to do it either. But her friend has a means to make her submit.

“If you don’t write,” she whispers. “I won’t lend you any sins for the day after tomorrow.”

That did it. The day after tomorrow is Confession and her confession slip is looking very insufficient. Sins are not permitted during this time of First Communion but you still need to confess. You must rigorously investigate, consider and seek to see if you can’t somehow find yet another sin. That is something the Princess absolutely can’t understand.

But Frieda is splendid at it. Her confession slip is the envy of the entire class. Thought sins are especially easy for her. She can discover dozens of magnificent sins easily at a time. She gets this from Papa. Once she really gets started she can attend the Father Confessor with such heaps of sins that he never really learns anything.

“Write Olga,” she whispers. “Then I’ll lend you eight fat sins.”

“Ten,” counters the princess.

Frieda Gontram nods. It doesn’t matter to her. She will give away twenty sins so she doesn’t have to write.

Olga sits at the table, picks up the quill and looks questioningly.

“Now write,” says the Legal Councilor.

“Honorable Princess–”

“Is this for Mama?” the princess asks.

“Naturally, who else would it be for? Write!”

“Honorable Princess–”

The princess doesn’t write. “If it’s for Mama, I can only write, ‘Dear Mama’.”

The Legal Councilor is impatient.

“Write what you want child, just write!”

She writes, “Dear Mama!”

Then the Legal Councilor dictates:

“Unfortunately I must inform you that there is a problem. There are so many things that I must consider and you can’t consider things when you have nothing to drink. We don’t have a drop of champagne in the house. In the interests of your case please send us a basket of spiced champagne, a basket of Pommery and six bottles of–”

“St. Marceaux!” cries the little attorney.

“St. Marceaux,” continues the Legal Councilor. That is namely the favorite of my colleague, Manasse, who so often helps.

With best Greetings,

Your–”

“Now see, Colleague!” he says. “You need to correct me! I didn’t dictate this letter alone but I will sign it single handedly, and he puts his name on it.

Frieda turns away from the window, “Are you finished? Yes? Well, I can only say that you didn’t need to write the letter. Olga’s Mama is coming and she’s in the garden now!”

She had seen the princess a long time ago but had kept quiet and not interrupted. If Olga wanted to get ten beautiful sins she should at least work for them!

All the Gontrams were like that, father, mother and children. They are very, very unwilling to work but are very willing to let others do it.

The princess enters, obese and sweaty, large diamonds on her fingers, in her ears, around her neck and in her hair in a vulgar display of extravagance.

She is a Hungarian Countess or Baroness. She met the prince somewhere in the Orient. A marriage was arranged, that was certain, but also certain, was that right from the beginning it was a fraud on both sides.

She wanted the marriage to make her impossible pregnancy legal. The prince wanted the same marriage to prevent an international scandal and hide his small mistake. It was a net of lies and impudent fraud, a legal feast for Herr Sebastian Gontram, everything was in motion, and nothing was solid. Every smallest assertion would prompt legal opposition from the other side. Every shadow would be extinguished through a court ruling.

Only one thing stayed the same, the little princess. Both the prince and the princess proclaimed themselves as father and mother and claimed her as their own. This product of their strange marriage is heir to many millions of dollars. The mother has the advantage, has custody.

“Have a seat, princess!”

The Legal Councilor would sooner bite his tongue than call this woman, ‘Highness’. She is his client and he doesn’t treat her a hair better than a peasant woman.

“Take your coat off!” but he doesn’t help her with it.

“We have just written you a letter,” he continues and reads the beautiful letter to her.

“But of course,” cries the princess. “I will take care of it first thing tomorrow morning!”

She opens her purse and pulls out a heavy envelope.

“Look at this, Honorable Legal Councilor. I came straight here with it. It is a letter from Lord, Count Ormes of Greater-Becskerekgyartelep, you know him.”

Herr Gontram furrows his brow. This isn’t good. The King himself would not be permitted to demand him to conduct any business while at home. He stands up and takes the letter.

“That’s very good,” he says. “Very good. We will clear this up in the morning at the office.”

She defends herself, “But it’s very urgent! It’s very important!”

The Legal Councilor interrupts her, “Urgent? Important? Let me tell you what is urgent and important, absolutely nothing. Only in the office can a person judge what is urgent and important.”

He reproaches her, “Princess, you are an educated woman! You know all about proper manners and enjoy them all the time. You must know that you don’t bring business home at night.”

She persists, “But I can never catch you at the office Honorable Legal Councilor. During this week alone I was–”

Now he is almost angry. “Then come next week! Do you think that all I do is work on your stuff alone? Do you really believe that is all I do? Do you know what my time alone costs for the murderer Houten? And it’s on my head to handle your millions as well.”

Then he begins to tell a funny story, incessantly relating an unending imaginary story of a strange crime lord and the heroic attorney that brings him to justice for all the horrible sex murders that he has committed.

The princess sighs, but she listens to him. She laughs once in awhile, always in the wrong places. She is the only one of all his listeners that never knows when he lies and also the only one that doesn't understand his jokes.

"Nice story for the children!" barks Attorney Manasse.

Both girls are listening eagerly, staring at the Legal Councilor with wide-open eyes and mouths. But he doesn't allow himself to be interrupted. It is never too early to get accustomed to such things. He talks as if sex murderers were common, that they happen all the time in life and you can encounter dozens of them every day.

He finally finishes, looks at the hour. "Ten already! You children must go to bed! Drink your spiced wine quickly."

The girls drink, but the princess declares that she will under no circumstances go back to her house. She is too afraid and can't sleep by herself, perhaps there is a disguised sex murderer in the house. She wants to stay with her friend. She doesn't ask her Mama. She asks only Frieda and her mother.

"You can as far as I'm concerned," says Frau Gontram. "But don't you oversleep! You need to be in church on time."

The girls curtsey and go out, arm in arm, inseparable.

"Are you afraid too?" asks the princess.

Frieda says, "What Papa was saying is all lies."

But she is still afraid anyway and at the same time strangely longing for these things. Not to experience them, oh no, not to know that. But she is thinking how she wants to be able to tell stories like that! Yes, that is another sin for confession! She sighs.

Above, they finish the spiced wine. Frau Gontram smokes one last cigar. Herr Manasse stands up to leave the room and the Legal Councilor is

telling the princess a new story. She hides her yawn behind her fan, attempts again to get a word in.

“Oh, yes, dear Legal Councilor,” she says quickly. “I almost forgot! May I pick your wife up at noon tomorrow in the carriage? I’d like to take her with me into Rolandseck for a bit.”

“Certainly,” he answers. “Certainly, if she wants to.”

But Frau Gontram says, “I can’t go out.”

“And why not?” the princess asks. “It would do you some good to get out and breathe some fresh spring air.”

“Frau Gontram slowly takes the cigar out from between her teeth. “I can’t go out. I don’t have a decent hat to wear–”

The Princess laughs as if it is a good joke. She will also send the Milliner over in the morning with the newest spring fashions.

“Then I’ll go,” says Frau Gontram. “But send Becker from Quirinusjass, they have the best.”

“And now I must go to sleep–good night!”

“Oh, yes, it is time I must get going too!” the princess cries hastily.

Legal Councilor escorts her out, through the garden and into the street. He helps her up into her carriage and then deliberately shuts the garden gate.

As he comes back, his wife is standing in the house door, a burning candle in her hand.

“I can’t go to bed yet,” she says quietly.

“What,” he asks. “Why not?”

She replies, “I can’t go to bed yet because Manasse is lying in it!”

They climb up the stairs to the second floor and go into the bedroom. In the giant marriage bed lies the little attorney pretty as can be and fast asleep. His clothing is hung carefully over the chair, his boots standing nearby. He has taken a clean nightgown out of the wardrobe and put it on. Near him lies his Cyclops like a crumpled young hedgehog.

Legal Councilor Gontram takes the candle from the nightstand and lights it.

“And the man insults me, says that I’m lazy!” he says shaking his head in wonderment.

“–And he is too lazy to go home!”

“Shh!” Frau Gontram says. “You’ll wake everyone up.”

She takes bedding and linen out of the wardrobe and goes very quietly downstairs and makes up two beds on the sofas. They sleep there.

Everyone is sleeping in the white house. Downstairs by the kitchen the strong cook, Billa, sleeps, the three hounds next to her. In the next room the four wild rascals sleep, Philipp, Paulche, Emilche and Josefche. Upstairs in Frieda’s large balcony room the two friends are sleeping. Wülfche sleeps nearby with his black tobacco stub. In the living room sleep Herr Sebastian Gontram and his wife. Up the hall Herr Manasse and Cyclops contentedly snore and way up in the attic sleeps Sophia, the housemaid. She has come back from the dance hall and lightly sneaked up the stairs.

Everyone is sleeping, twelve people and four sharp hounds. But something is not sleeping. It shuffles slowly around the white house–

Outside by the garden flows the Rhine, rising and breasting its embankments. It appears in the sleeping village, presses itself against the old toll office.

Cats and Tomcats are pushing through the bushes, hissing, biting, striking each other, their round hot glittering eyes possessed with aching, agonizing and denied lust–

In the distance at the edge of the city you hear the drunken songs of the wild students–

Something creeps all around the white house on the Rhine, sneaks through the garden, past a broken embankment and overturned benches. It looks in pleasure at the Sunday antics of the love hungry cats and climbs up to the house. It scratches with hard nails on the wall making a loose piece of plaster fall, pokes softly at the door so that it rattles lightly like the wind.

Then it’s in the house shuffling up the stairs, creeping cautiously through all the rooms and stops, looks around, smiles.

Heavy silver stands on the mahogany buffet, rich treasures from the time of the Kaiser. But the windowpanes are warped and patched with paper. Dutchmen hang on the wall. They are all good paintings from Koekoek, Verboekhuoeven, Verwee and Jan Stobbaerts, but they have holes and the old golden frames are black with spider webs.

Something sneaks through the still house

These magnificent beauties came from the ArchBishop’s old hall. But the broken crystal is sticky with flyspecks.

Something sneaks through the still house and each time it comes it breaks something, almost nothing, an infinite smallness, a crack. But again and again, each time it comes, the crack grows in the night. There is a small noise, a light creaking in the hall, a nail loosens and the old furniture gives way. There is a rattle at the swollen shutters and a strange clanking between the windowpanes.

Everyone sleeps in this big house on the Rhine but something slowly shuffles around.

Chapter Two

Expains how the idea for Alraune came about.

THE sun had already set and the candles were burning on the chandelier in the Festival room as Privy Councilor ten Brinken entered. He appeared festive enough in his dress suit. There was a large star on his white vest and a gold chain in the buttonhole from which twenty small medals dangled.

The Legal Councilor stood up, greeted him, and then he and the old gentleman went around the room with threadbare smiles, saying kind words to everyone. They stopped in front of the celebrating girls and the old gentleman took two gold rings out of a beautiful leather case and formally presented them. The one with a sapphire was for blond Frieda and the ruby was for dark Olga. Then he gave a very wise speech to both of them.

“Would you like to sit for a spell?” asked Herr Sebastian Gontram. “We’ve been sitting over there for four hours. Seventeen courses! Isn’t that something! Here is the menu, is there anything you would like?”

The Privy Councilor thanked him, but he had already eaten.

Then Frau Gontram came into the room in a blue, somewhat old-fashioned silk gown with a train. Her hair was done up high.

“I can’t eat anymore ice cream,” she cried. “Prince Puckler had Billa put all of it on the cinnamon noodles!”

The guests laughed. They never knew what to expect in the Gontram house.

Attorney Manasse cried, “Bring the dish in here! We haven’t seen Prince Puckler or fresh cinnamon noodles all day!”

Privy Councilor ten Brinken looked around for a chair. He was a small man, smooth shaven, with thick watery bags under his eyes. He was repulsive enough with swollen hanging lips, a huge meaty nose, and the lid of his left eye drooped heavy but the right stood wide open, squinting around in a predatory manner. Someone behind him said:

“Good Day Uncle Jakob.”

was Frank Braun. The Privy Councilor turned around; it was very unusual to see his nephew here.

“You’re here?” he asked. “I can only imagine why.”

The student laughed, “Naturally! But you are so wise uncle. You look good by the way, and very official, like a university professor in proud dress uniform with all your medals. I’m here incognito–over there with the other students stuck at the west table.”

“That just proves your twisted thinking, where else would you be sitting?” his uncle said. “When you once–”

“Yes, yes,” Frank Braun interrupted him. “When I finally get as old as you, then I will be permitted–and so on–That’s what you would tell me, isn’t it? All heaven be praised that I’m not yet twenty Uncle Jakob. I like it this way much better.”

The Privy Councilor sat down. “Much better? I can believe that. In the fourth Semester and doing nothing but fighting, drinking, fencing, riding, loving and making poor grades! I wrote your mother about the grades the university gave you. Tell me youngster, just what are you doing in college anyway?”

The student filled two glasses, “Here Uncle Jakob, drink, then your suffering will be lighter! Well, I’ve been in several classes already, not just one, but an entire series of classes. Now I’ve left and I’m not going back.”

“Prosit!”

“Prosit!” The Privy Councilor said. “Have you finished?”

“Finished?” Frank Braun laughed. “I’m much more than finished. I’m overflowing! I’m done with college and I’m done with the Law. I’m going to travel. Why should I be in college? It’s possible that the other students can learn from you professors but their brains must then comply with your methods. My brain will not comply. I find every single one of you unbelievably foolish, boring and stupid.”

The professor took a long look at him.

“You are immensely arrogant, my dear boy,” he said quietly.

“Really?” The student leaned back, put one leg over the other. “Really? I scarcely believe that. But if so, it doesn’t really matter. I know what I’m doing. First, I’m saying this to annoy you a bit–You look so funny when you are annoyed. Second, to hear back from you that I’m right.

For example, you, uncle, are certainly a shrewd old fox, very intelligent, clever and you know a multitude of things–But in college weren’t you just as insufferable as the rest of your respected colleagues? Didn’t you at one time or another say to yourself that you wanted to perhaps just have some fun?”

“Me? Most certainly not!” the professor said. “But that is something else. When you once–Well, ok, you know already–Now tell me boy, where in all the world will you go from here? Your mother will not like to hear that you are not coming home.”

“Very well,” cried Frank Braun. “I will answer you.”

“But first, why have you have rented this house to Gontram? He is certainly not a person that does things by the book. Still, it is always good when you can have someone like that from time to time. His tubercular wife naturally interests you as a medical doctor. All the doctors in the city are

enraptured by this phenomenon without lungs. Then there's the Princess that you would gladly sell your castle in Mehlem to.

Finally, dear uncle, there are the two teenagers over there, beautiful, fresh vegetables aren't they? I know how you like young girls–Oh, in all honor, naturally. You are always honorable Uncle Jakob!"

He stopped, lit a cigarette and blew out a puff of smoke. The Privy Councilor squinted at him poisonously with a predatory right eye.

"What did you want to tell me?" he asked lightly.

The student gave a short laugh. "Oh, nothing. Nothing at all!"

He stood up, went to the corner table, picked up a cigar box and opened it. They were the expensive cigars of the Privy Councilor.

"The smokes, dear uncle. Look, Romeo and Juliet, your brand. The Legal Councilor has certainly not spared any expense for you!"

He offered one to the Privy Councilor.

"Thank you," growled the professor. "Thank you. Now once again, what is it that you want to tell me?"

Frank Braun moved his chair closer.

"I will tell you Uncle Jakob. But first I need to reproach you. I don't like what you did, do you hear me? I know myself quite well, know that I've been wasting my life and that I continue–Leave that. You don't care and I'm not asking you to pay any of my debts.

I request that you never again write such a letter to our house. You will write back to mother and tell her that I am very virtuous, very moral, work very hard and that I'm moving on and such stuff. Do you understand?"

"Yes, that I must lie," said the Privy Councilor. "It should sound realistic and witty, but it will sound slimy as a snail, even to her."

The student looked at him squarely, “Yes uncle, you should even lie. Not on my account, you know that, but for mother.”

He stopped for a moment gazing into his glass, “and since you will tell these lies for me, I will now tell you this.”

“I am curious,” said the Privy Councilor a little uncertainly.

“You know my life,” the student continued and his voice rang with bitter honesty. “You know that I, up until today, have been a stupid youth. You know because you are an old and clever man, highly educated, rich, known by all, decorated with titles and orders, because you are my uncle and my mother’s only brother. You think that gives you a right to educate me. Right or not, you will never do it. No one will ever do it, only life will educate me.”

The professor slapped his knee and laughed out loud. “Yes, life! Just wait youngster. It will educate you soon enough. It has enough twists and turns, beautiful rules and laws, solid boundaries and thorny barriers.”

Frank Braun replied, “They are nothing for me, much less for me than for you. Have you, Uncle Jakob, ever fought through the twists, cut through the wiry thorns and laughed at all the laws? I have.”

“Pay attention uncle,” he continued. “I know your life as well. The entire city knows it and the sparrows pipe their little jokes about you from the rooftops. But the people only talk to themselves in whispers, because they fear you, fear your cleverness and your money. They fear your power and your energy.

I know why little Anna Paulert died. I know why your handsome gardener had to leave so quickly for America. I know many more little stories about you. Oh, I don’t approve, certainly not. But I don’t think of you as evil. I even admire you a little perhaps because you, like a little king, can do so many things with impunity. The only thing I don’t understand is how you are successful with all the children. You are so ugly.”

Privy Councilor played with his watch chain. Then he looked quietly at his nephew, almost flattered.

“You really don’t understand that?”

The student replied, “No, absolutely not at all. But I do understand how you have come to it! For a long time you’ve had everything that you wanted, everything that a person could have within the normal constraints of society. Now you want more. The brook is bored in its old bed, steps here and there over the narrow banks–It is in your blood.”

The professor raised his glass, reached it out to him.

“Give me another, my boy,” he said. His voice trembled a little and certainly rang out with solemnity. “You are right. It is in the blood, my blood and your blood.”

He drank and reached out to shake hands with his nephew.

“You will write mother like I want you to?” asked Frank Braun.

“Yes, I will,” replied the old man.

The student said, “Thank you Uncle Jakob.”

He took the outstretched hand and shook it.

“Now go, you old Don Juan, call the Communicants! They both look beautiful in their sacred gowns, don’t they?”

“Hmm,” said the uncle. “Don’t they look good to you?”

Frank Braun laughed. “Me? Oh, my God! No, Uncle Jakob, I am no rival, not today. Today I have a higher ambition–perhaps when I am as old as you are!–But I am not the guardian of their virtue. Those two celebrating roses will not improve until they have been plucked. Someone will, and soon–Why not you? Hey Olga, Frieda! Come on over here!”

But neither girl came over. They were hovering around Dr. Mohnen, filling his glass and listening to his suggestive stories. The princess came over; Frank Braun stood up and offered her his chair.

“Sit down, sit down!” she cried. “I have absolutely nothing to chat with you about!”

“Just a few minutes, your Highness. I will go get a cigarette,” the student said. “My uncle has been waiting all night for a chance to give you his compliments. He will be overjoyed.”

The Privy Councilor was not overjoyed about it. He would have much rather had the little princess sitting there, but now he entertained the mother–

Frank Braun went to the window as the Legal Councilor and Frau Marion went up to the Grand Piano. Herr Gontram sat down on the piano bench, turned around and said.

“I would like a little quiet please. Frau Marion would like to sing a song for us.”

He turned to the Lady, “What would you like after that dear Frau?–Another one I hope. Perhaps **‘Les Papillions’** ? or perhaps **‘Il Baccio’** from Arditti?–Give me the music for them as well!”

The student looked across, she always looked good, this old, well-formed lady. He believed she really had all the adventures that she related. At one time she had been the fiery Diva of Europe. Now she lived in this city that was still stuck back in the fourth century in her little villa. She took long walks through her gardens every evening, put flowers on the graves of her dead hounds and cried for a half-hour.

Now she sang. She had lost her magnificent voice years ago, but there was still a rare magic in her performance, out of the old school. The smile of the conqueror lay on her rouged lips and the thick face paint attempted to capture the former sweetness of her features. Her thick sweaty hands played

with her ivory fan and her eyes searched the room as if trying to scratch and pull the applause out of the audience.

Oh yes, she certainly fit in here, Madame Marion Vère de Vère, fit in this house, like all the others that were guests. Frank Braun looked around. There sat his dear uncle with the princess and behind them leaning against the door stood Attorney Manasse and Chaplain Schöder. The long, gaunt, dark chaplain was the best wine connoisseur on the Mosel and the Saar. It was nearly impossible to find a wine cellar that he had not gone into and sampled. Schröder had written a never-ending clever book about the abstruse philosophy of Plotinus and at the same time had written the skits for the Puppet Theater in Cologne. He was particularly enthusiastic about the first Napoleon. He hated the Prussians and anyone that spoke of the Kaiser. Every year on the fifth of May he traveled back to Cologne and the Minority Church where he celebrated a High Mass for the tormented dead of the “Grand Army”.

There sat large, gold spectacled, Stanislaus Schacht, candidate for a degree in Philosophy, in his sixteenth semester, too fat, too lazy to get off his chair. For years he had lived as a lodger at the widow of Professor Dr. von Dollinger’s house. For a long time now he had been installed as the new master of the house. She was that little, ugly, over thin woman sitting beside him, always filling his glass and loading his plate with heaping portions of food. She didn’t eat anything–but she drank as much as he did and with every new glass her ardor grew. She laughingly caressed his huge meaty arm with her bony finger.

Near her stood Karl Mohnen, Dr. jur and Dr. phil. He was a schoolmate and chess player. It was through chess that they had met and become great friends. By now he had studied almost as long as Stanislaus, only he was always taking exams, always changing his major. At the moment it was Philosophy and he was studying for his third exam. He looked like a clerk in a department store, quick, hurried and always moving.

Frank Braun always thought that he should go into business as a merchant. He would certainly be happy running a confectionery where he would have women to serve him. He was always looking for a rich party–on the street–large window promenades too. He had an aptitude for meeting

new people and making new friends, especially traveling English women. He clutched onto them gladly–but sadly they had no money.

There was still another person there, the small Hussar lieutenant with the little black mustache that was chatting with the girls. He, the young Count Geroldingen, could always be found back stage in every theater performance. He painted the sets, was talented with the violin and the best horse racer in the regiment. He was now telling Olga and Frieda something about Beethoven that was horribly boring. They were only listening because he was such a handsome little lieutenant.

Oh yes, they all belonged here without exception. They all had a little gypsy blood–despite titles and orders, despite tonsures and uniforms, despite diamonds and golden spectacles, despite all the civilized posturing. Some were devouring food; others were making small detours away from the path of civilized decency.

A roar resounded and merged with Frau Marion's singing. It was the Gontram rascals fighting on the stairs. Their mother went up to quiet them down. Then Wölfchen screamed in the next room and the girls had to carry the child up into the attic. They took Cyclops along, putting both to bed in the narrow child's wagon.

Frau Marion began her second song, **"The Dance of Shadows"** from the opera **"Dinorah".**

The princess asked the Privy Councilor about his latest endeavors and if she could come once more to see the remarkable frogs, amphibians and cute monkeys. Yes, she could certainly come. There was a new species of rose that she should really see. It was at his Mehlemer castle. He also had large white camellias that his gardener had planted; she would be interested in them as well.

But the princess was more interested in the frogs and monkeys than the roses and camellias so he related his endeavors to transfer eggs from one frog to another and artificially inseminate them. He told her that he had already produced a beautiful female frog with two heads and another with fourteen eyes on its back.

He would dissect one and remove the eggs from it and fertilize them before transferring the little tadpoles to another frog and just like that, the cells would merrily divide and develop into new life with heads and tails, eyes and legs.

Then he told her about his efforts with monkeys, relating that he had two young long tailed monkeys that were being suckled by their virgin mother–She had never even seen a male monkey!

That interested the princess the most and she asked for all the details. She had read something about it but didn't understand all the Greek and Latin words. Maybe he could explain it to her in perfect German so she could understand?

The obscene cliches and behaviors dripped out of the Privy Councilor as he explained in anatomical detail just what he did. Spittle drooled down from the corners of his mouth and ran down his heavy, hanging lower lip.

He enjoyed this game, this obscene chatter, watching her voluptuously slurp up every shameful word. Then when he was close to saying an especially repulsive word, he would throw in "Your Highness" and savor with delight the titillation of the delicious contrast.

And how she listened to him! Her face was becoming flushed, excited, almost trembling, sucking this Bordello atmosphere in with all of her pores, as he unveiled what really went on behind the thin scientific banner.

"Do you only inseminate monkeys, Herr Privy Councilor?" she asked breathlessly.

"No," he said, "also rats and Guinea pigs. Would you like to watch, Your Highness, when I–"

He lowered his voice, almost whispered.

She cried, "Yes, yes! I must see it! Gladly, very gladly! When?"

Then she added with a slow, almost evil dignity. “Did you know, Herr Privy Councilor, that nothing interests me more than the study of medicine. I believe I would have been a very talented doctor.”

He looked at her and grinned widely, “No doubt, Your Highness.”

And he thought, that she certainly would have been a much better Bordello Mother. But he was satisfied; he had his little fish hooked safely on his line.

Then he continued again about his new breed of rose and the camellias at his castle on the Rhine. It was so troublesome for him, and he had only taken possession of it as a favor. The location was such an excellent one and the view–Perhaps when her Highness finally decided to buy a place she might–

Princess Wolkonski decided herself, without any hesitation at all.

“Yes, certainly Herr Privy Councillor, yes, certainly, naturally I will take your castle!”

She saw Frank Braun going past and called out to him, “Hey, Herr Studious! Herr Studious! Come over here! Your uncle has promised that I can observe one of his experiments. Isn’t that delightfully charming? Have you already seen what he does?”

“No,” said Frank Braun. “I’m not at all interested.”

He turned to go away but she grabbed him by the arm and stopped him.

“Give me a cigarette! Oh, and, yes, a glass of champagne please.”

She shivered in hot desire, beads of sweat crept over her massive flesh. Her crude senses had been whipped to a frenzy from her shameless talk with the old man. Her passion needed a goal, a target, and it broke over the young fellow like a huge wave.

“Tell me, Herr Studious,” her breath panted, her mighty breasts threatened to leap out of her dress. “Tell me, do you believe that–that–Herr Privy Councilor–his science–his experiments with artificial insemination–does he do it with people as well?”

She knew very well that he didn’t, but she needed to say it before she could get to what she really wanted with this young, fresh and handsome student.

Frank Braun laughed, instinctively understanding what she had in mind.

“But of course, Your Highness,” he said lightly. “Most certainly! Uncle is already working on it, has discovered a new procedure so refined that the poor woman in question is not even aware of it. Not at all–until she wakes up one beautiful day and discovers that she is pregnant, probably in the fourth of fifth month!

Be very careful Your Highness, keep a watchful eye on Herr Privy Councilor. Who knows, you might already be–”

“Heaven Forbid!” screamed the princess.

“Yes, it could happen,” he cried. “Wouldn’t it be very unpleasant? When you have done absolutely nothing to make it happen!”

Crash! Something fell off the wall, fell on Sophia, hitting the housemaid right on the head. The maid screamed out loud and in her fright dropped the silver tray she had been serving coffee on.

“A shame about the beautiful silver service,” said Frau Gontram calmly. “What happened?”

Dr. Mohnen immediately took a quick look at the crying housemaid, cut a strand of hair away, washed the gaping edges of the wound and stopped the bleeding with a yellow Iron Chloride wad. He didn’t forget to pat the beautiful girl on the cheeks and furtively squeeze one of her firm

breasts. Then he gave her some wine to drink, spoke to her, lightly in her ear.

The Hussar lieutenant stooped, picked up the thing that had caused the damage, raised it high and looked at it from all sides.

There were all kinds of remarkable things hanging on the wall. There was a Kaneka Idol, half male and half female, colorfully painted with yellow and red stripes. Two old heavy and deformed riding boots hung there complete with impressive Spanish spurs. There were all sorts of rusty weapons as well

On the gray wall was also pressed the Doctorate Diploma of some old Gontram from a Jesuit College in Seville. Near it hung a wonderful ivory crucifix inlaid with gold. On the other side was a large heavy Buddhist cross with a rose in the center carved out of green Jade. Right above that you could see the large tear in the wallpaper where a nail had torn its way out of the brittle plaster.

It was a brown dusty thing made of rock hard wooden root. It looked like an ancient wrinkled man.

“Oh, it’s our alraune!” Frau Gontram said. “It’s just as well that it fell on Sophie, she has a hard skull!–When Wölfchen was born I gave that disgusting manikin to him. I was certain he would be able to break it to pieces but he couldn’t.”

The Legal Councilor explained, “This has been in our family for over two hundred years now. It has done this once before. My grandfather told us that once in the night it sprang off the wall and fell on his head–He was completely drunk when it happened though–He always liked having a few drops to drink.”

“What is it really?” the Hussar lieutenant asked.

“Well, it brings gold into the house,” answered Herr Gontram. “It is an old legend–Manasse can tell you all about it–Come over here, Herr Colleague, tell us, Herr History–What is the legend of the alraune?”

But the little attorney didn’t want to, “Why? Everyone knows it already!”

“No one knows it, Herr Attorney,” the lieutenant cried at him. “No one. Your learning greatly overshadows that of modern education.”

“So tell us, Manasse,” said Frau Gontram. “I always wanted to know what that ugly thing was good for.”

He began. He spoke dryly, matter of factly, as if he were reading some piece out of a book. He spoke unhurried, scarcely raising his voice while swinging the manikin root back and forth in his right hand like a baton.

“Alraune, albraune, mandragora–also called mandrake–mandragora is its official name, a plant belonging to the Nightshade family. It is found around the Mediterranean, Southeast Europe and Asia up to the Himalayas. Its leaves and flowers contain a narcotic that was used in ancient times as a sleeping potion and during operations at the illustrious medical college in Salerno, Italy. The leaves were smoked and the fruit made into a love potion. It stimulates lust and increases potency. The plant is named Dudaim in the Old Testament where Jacob used it to increase Labaan’s flock of sheep.

The root plays the leading role in the saga of the alraune because of its strange resemblance to an old male or female figurine. It was mentioned by Pythagoras and already in his time believed capable of making a person invisible. It is used for magick or the opposite, as a talisman against witchcraft.

The German alraune story began in the early Middle Ages in connection with the crusades. Known criminals were hung stark naked from a gallows at a crossroads. At the moment their neck was broken they lost their semen and it fell to the earth fertilizing it and creating a male or female alraune. It had to be dug out of the ground beneath the gallows when the clock struck midnight and you needed to plug your ears with cotton and wax or its dreadful screams would make you fall down in terror. Even Shakespeare tells of this.

After it is dug up and carried back home you keep it healthy by bringing it a little to eat at every meal and bathing it in wine on the Sabbath. It brings luck in peace and in war, is a protection against witchcraft and brings lots of money into the house. It is good for prophecy and makes its owner lovable. It brings women love magick, fertility and easy childbirth. It makes people fall madly and wildly in love with them.

Yet it also brings sorrow and pain whereever it is. The house where it stays will be pursued by bad luck and it will drive its owner to greed, fornication and other crimes before leading him at last to death and then to hell. Nevertheless, the alraune is very beloved, much sought after and brings a high price when it can be found.

They say that Bohemian general Albrecht Wallenstein carried an alraune around with him and they say the same thing about Henry the Eighth, the English King with so many wives."

The attorney became quiet, threw the hard piece of wood in front of him onto the table.

"Very interesting, really very interesting," cried Count Geroldingen. "I am deeply indebted to you for sharing that bit of information Herr Attorney."

But Madame Marion declared that she would not permit such a thing in her house for even a minute and looked with frightened, believing eyes at the stiff bony mask of Frau Gontram.

Frank Braun walked quickly back to the Privy Councilor. His eyes glowed; he gripped the old gentleman on the shoulder and shook it.

"Uncle Jakob," he whispered. "Uncle Jakob–"

"What is it now boy?" The professor asked. He stood up and followed his nephew to the window.

“Uncle Jakob,” the student repeated. “That’s it!–That’s what you need to do! It’s better than making stupid jokes with frogs, monkeys and little children! Do it Uncle Jakob, go a new way, where no one has gone before!”

His voice trembled; in nervous haste he blew a puff of smoke out from his cigarette.

“I don’t understand a word you are saying,” said the old man.

“Oh, you must understand Uncle Jakob!–Didn’t you hear what he said?–Create an Alraune, one that lives, one of flesh and blood!–You can do it Uncle, you alone and no one else in the world.”

The Privy Councilor looked at him uncertainly. But in the voice of the student lay such certainty, conviction and belief in his skill that he became curious against his will.

“Explain yourself more clearly Frank,” he said. “I really don’t know what you mean.”

His nephew shook his head hastily, “Not now Uncle Jakob. With your permission I will escort you home. We can talk then.”

He turned quickly, strode to the coffeepot, took a cup, emptied it and took another in quick gulps.

Sophia, the other girl, was trying to evade her comforter and Dr. Mohnen was running around here and there hyper as a cow’s tail during fly season. His fingers felt the need to wash something, to pick something up. He took up the alraune and rubbed it with a clean napkin trying to wipe the dust and grime away that clung to it in layers. It was useless; the thing had not been cleaned for over a century and would only get more napkins dirty. He was filled with the sense that something was not right. He swung it high and skillfully threw it into the middle of the large wine bowl.

“Drink alraune,” he cried. “You have been treated badly in this house and must certainly be thirsty!”

Then he climbed up on a chair and delivered a long solemn speech to the white robed virgins.

“I hope you can stay eternally as pure as you are tonight,” he finished.

He lied, he didn’t want that at all. No one wished that, much less the two young ladies, but they clapped with the others, went over to him, curtsied and thanked him.

Chaplain Schröder stood next to the Legal Councilor complaining powerfully that the date was nearing when the new Civil Law would go into effect. Less than ten more years and the Code of Napoleon would be gone and people in the Rhineland would have the same civil rights as over there in Prussia! It was absolutely unthinkable!

“Yes,” sighed the Legal Councilor, “and all the work! A person has to learn everything all over again, as if they don’t have enough to do as it is.”

He was completely indifferent on the basis that it would not effect him very much since he had studied the new laws already and had passed the exam, thank God!

The princess left and took Frau Marion with her in her carriage. Olga stayed over with her friend again. They stood by the door and said goodbye to the others as they left, one after the other.

“Aren’t you going too, Uncle Jakob?” the student asked.

“I must wait a bit,” said the Privy Councilor. “My carriage is not here yet. It will be here in a moment.”

Frank Braun looked out the window. There was the little widow, Frau von Dollinger, going down the stairs nimble as a squirrel in spite of her forty years, down into the garden, falling down, springing back up. She ran right into a smooth tree trunk, wrapped her arms and legs around it and started kissing it passionately, completely drunk and senseless from wine and lust.

Stanislaus Schacht tried to untangle her but she held on like a beetle. He was strong and sober in spite of the enormous quantity of wine that he had drunk. She screamed as he pulled her away trying to stay clasped to the smooth tree trunk but he picked her up and carried her in his arms. Then she recognized him, pulled off his hat and started kissing him on his smooth bald head.

Now the professor was standing, speaking some last words with the Legal Councilor.

“I’d like to ask a favor,” he said. “Would you mind giving me the unlucky little man?”

Frau Gontram answered before her husband could. “Certainly Herr Privy Councilor. Take that nasty alraune along with you! It is certainly something more for a bachelor!”

She reached into the large wine bowl and pulled out the root manikin but the hard wood hit the edge of the bowl, knocking it over, and it rolled to the floor with a loud crash that resounded through the room. The magnificent old crystal bowl broke into hundreds of crystal shards as the bowl’s sweet contents spilled over the table and onto the floor.

“Holy Mother of God!” she cried out. “It is certainly a good thing that it is finally leaving my house!”

Chapter Three

Informs how Frank Braun persuaded the Privy Councilor to create Alraune

THEY sat in the carriage, Professor Ten Brinken and his nephew. They didn't speak. Frank Braun leaned back staring straight ahead, sunk deeply into his thoughts. The Privy Councilor was observing, squinting over at him watchfully.

The trip lasted scarcely half an hour. They rolled along the open road, turned to the right, went downhill over the rough road to Lendenich. There in the middle of the village lay the birthplace of the Brinken family.

It was a large, almost square complex with gardens and a park. Back from the street stood a row of insignificant old buildings. They turned around a corner past a shrine of the patron Saint of the village, the Holy Saint John of Nepomuk. His statue was decorated with flowers and lit with two eternal lamps that were placed in niches by the corners.

The horses stopped in front of a large mansion. A servant shut the fenced gate behind them and opened the carriage door.

"Bring us some wine Aloys," commanded the Privy Councilor. "We will be in the library."

He turned to his nephew. "Will you be sleeping here Frank? Or should the carriage wait?"

The student shook his head, "Neither, I will go back to the city on foot."

They walked across the courtyard, entered the lower level of the house at a door on the right hand side. It was literally a great hall with a tiny antechamber and a couple of other small rooms nearby.

The walls were lined with long immense shelves containing thousands of books. Low glass cases stood here and there full of Roman artifacts. Many graves had been emptied, robbed of their cherished and carefully preserved treasures. The floor was covered in thick carpet. There were a couple of desks, armchairs and sofas that stood scattered around the room.

They entered. The Privy Councilor threw his alraune on a divan. They lit candles, pulled a couple of chairs together and sat down. The servant uncorked a dusty bottle.

“You can go,” said his master. “But don’t go too far. The young gentleman will be leaving and you will need to let him out.”

“Well?” he turned to his nephew.

Frank Braun drank. He picked the root manikin up and toyed with it. It was still a little moist and appeared to be almost flexible.

“It is clear enough,” he murmured. “There are the eyes–both of them. The nose pokes up there and that opening is the mouth. Look here Uncle Jakob. Doesn’t it look as if it is smiling? The arms are somewhat diminutive and the legs have grown together at the knees. It is a strange thing.”

He held it high, turned it around in all directions.

“Look around Alraune!” he cried. “This is your new home. You will be much happier here with Herr Jakob ten Brinken than you were in the house of the Gontrams.”

“You are old,” he continued. “four hundred, perhaps six hundred years old or even more. Your father was hung because he was a murderer or a horse thief, or else because he made fun of some great knight in armor or in priestly robes.

The important thing is that he was a criminal in his time and they hanged him. At the last moment of his life his seed fell to the earth and created you, you strange creature. Then your mother earth took the seed of this criminal into her fertile womb, secretly fashioned and gave birth to you.

You the great, the all-powerful–Yes you, you miserable ugly creature!– Then they dug you up at the midnight hour, at the crossroads, shaking in terror at your howling, shrieking screams.

The first thing you saw as you looked around in the moonlight was your father hanging there on the gallows with a broken neck and his rotting flesh hanging in tatters.

They took you with them, these people that had tied the noose around your father. They held you, carried you home. You were supposed to bring money into their house. Blood money and young love.

They knew well that you would bring pain, misery, despair and in the end a horrible death. They knew it and still they wanted you, still they dug you up, still they took you home, selling their souls for love and money."

The Privy Councilor said, "You have a beautiful way of seeing things my boy. You are a dreamer."

"Yes," said the student. "That's what I am–just like you."

"Like me?" the professor laughed. "Now I think that part of my life is long gone."

But his nephew shook his head, "No Uncle Jakob. It isn't. Only you can make real what other people call fantastic. Just think of all your experiments! For you it is more like child's play that may or may not lead to some purpose.

But never, never would a normal person come up with your ideas. Only a dreamer could do it–and only a savage, a wildman, that has the hot blood of the Brinkens flowing through his veins. Only he would dare attempt what you should now do Uncle Jakob."

The old man interrupted him, indignant and yet at the same time flattered.

“You crazy boy!–You don’t even know yet if I will have any desire to do this mysterious thing you keep talking about and I still don’t have the slightest idea what it is!”

The student didn’t pause, his voice rang lightly, confidently and every syllable was convincing.

“Oh, you will do it Uncle Jakob. I know that you will do it, will do it because no one else can, because you are the only person in the world that can make it happen. There are certainly a few other professors that are attempting some of the same things you have already done, perhaps even gone further.

But they are normal people, dry, wooden–men of science. They would laugh in my face if I came to them with my idea, would chide me for being a fool. Or else they would throw me completely out the door, because I would dare come to them with such things, such thoughts. Thoughts that they would call immoral and objectionable. Such ideas that dare trespass on the craft of the Great Creator and play a trick on all of nature.

You will not laugh at me Uncle Jakob, not you! You will not laugh at me or throw me out the door. It will fascinate you the same way it fascinates me. That’s why you are the only person that can do it!”

“But what then, by all the gods,” cried the Privy Councilor, “what is it?”

The student stood up, filled both glasses to the rims.

“A toast, old sorcerer,” he cried. “A toast! To a newer, younger wine that will flow out of your glass tubes. Toast, Uncle Jakob to your new living alraune–your new child!”

He clinked his glass against his uncle’s, emptied it in a gulp and threw it high against the ceiling where it shattered. The shards fell soundlessly on

the heavy carpet.

He pulled his chair closer.

“Now listen uncle and I will tell you what I mean. I know you are really impatient with my long introduction–Don’t think ill of me. It has helped me put my thoughts in order, to stir them up, to make them comprehensible and tangible.

Here it is:

You should create a living alraune, Uncle Jakob, turn this old legend into reality. Who cares if it is superstition, a ghostly delusion of the Middle Ages or mystic flim-flam from ancient times?

You, you can make the old lies come true. You can create it. It can stand there in the light of day tangible for all the world to see–No stupid professor would be able to deny it.

Now pay attention, this is what needs to be done!

The criminal, uncle, you can find easily enough. I don’t think it matters if he dies on a gallows at a crossroads. We are a progressive people. Our prisons and Guillotine are convenient, convenient for you as well. Thanks to your connections it will be easy to obtain and save the rare seed of the dead that will bring forth new life.

And Mother Earth?–What is her symbol? What does she represent? She is fertility, uncle. The earth is the feminine, the woman. She takes the semen, takes it into her womb, nourishes it, lets it germinate, grow, bloom and bear fruit. So you take what is fertile like the earth herself–take a woman.

But Mother Earth is the eternal prostitute, she serves all. She is the eternal mother, is always for sale, the prostitute of billions. She refuses her lascivious love to none, offers herself gladly to anyone that will take her. Everything that lives has been fertilized in her glorious womb and she has given birth to it. It has always been this way throughout the ages.

That is why you must use a prostitute Uncle Jakob. Take the most shameless, the cheekiest one of them all. Take one that is born to be a whore, not one that is driven to her profession or one that is seduced into it for money. Oh no, not one of those. Take one that is already wanton, that learns as she goes, one whose shame is her greatest pleasure and reason for living. You must choose her. Only her womb would be like the mother earth's. You know how to find her. You are rich–You are no school boy in these things.

You can pay her a lot of money, purchase her services for your research. If she is the right one she will reel with laughter, will press her greasy bosom against you and kiss you passionately–She will do this because you have offered her something that no other man has offered her before.

You know better than I what happens then, how to bring about with humans what you have already done with monkeys and guinea pigs. Get everything ready, ready for the moment when the murderer's bleeding head springs into the basket!"

He jumped up, leaned over the table, looked across at his uncle with intense forceful eyes. The Privy Councilor caught his gaze, parried it with a squint like a curved dirty scimitar parries a supple foil.

"What then nephew?" he said. "And then after the child comes into the world? What then?"

The student hesitated, his words dripped slowly, falling, "Then–we–will–have–a–magickal–creature."

His voice swung lightly, yielding and reverberating like musical tones.

"Then we will see what truth there is in the old legend, get a glimpse into the deepest bowels of nature."

The Privy Councilor opened his lips to speak but Frank Braun wouldn't let him get a word in.

“Then we can prove whether there is something, some mysterious power, that is stronger than all the laws of science that we know. We can prove whether this life is worth the trouble to live–especially for us.”

“Especially for us?” the professor repeated.

Frank Braun said, “Yes Uncle Jakob–especially for us! For you and for me–and the few hundred other people that stand as Masters over their lives–and then prove it even for the enslaved, the ones on the street, for the rest of the herd.”

Then suddenly, abruptly, he asked, “Uncle Jakob, do you believe in God?”

The Privy Councilor clicked his lips impatiently, “Do I believe in God? What does that have to do with it?”

But his nephew pressed him, wouldn’t let him brush it away, “Answer me Uncle Jakob, answer. Do you believe in God?”

He bent down closer to the old man, held him fast in his gaze.

The Privy Councilor said, “What do you mean boy? According to the understanding that everyone else uses, what I recognize as true and believe is most certainly not God. There is only a feeling–but that feeling is so uncontrollable, something so–”

“Yes, yes, uncle,” cried the student. “What about this feeling?”

The professor resisted like always, moved back and forth in his chair.

“Well, if I must speak candidly–there are times–very rare–with long stretches in between–”

Frank Braun cried, “You believe–You do believe in God! Oh, I knew it! All the Brinkens do–all of them up to you.”

He threw up his head, raised his lips high showing rows of smooth shiny teeth, and pushed out every word forcefully.

“Then you will do it Uncle Jakob. Then you must do it and I don’t need to speak with you any more about it. It is something that has been given to you, one out of a million people. It is possible for you–possible for you to play at being God!

If your God is real and lives he must answer you for your impertinence, for daring to do such a thing!”

He became quiet, went back and forth with large strides through the long room. Then he took up his hat and went up to the old man.

“Good night Uncle Jakob,” he said. “Will you do it?”

He reached out his hand to him but the old man didn’t see it. He was staring into space, brooding.

“I don’t know,” he answered finally.

Frank Braun took the alraune from the table, shoved it into the old man’s hands. His voice rang mocking and haughty.

“Here, consult with this!”

But the next moment the cadence of his voice was different.

Quietly he said, “Oh, I know you will do it.”

He strode quickly to the door, stopped there a moment, turned around and came back.

“Just one more thing Uncle Jakob. When you do it–”

But the Privy Councilor burst out, “I don’t know whether I’ll do it.”

“Ok,” said the student. “I won’t ask you any more about it. But just in case you should decide to do it–will you promise me something?”

“What?” the professor inquired.

answered, “Please don’t let the princess watch!”

“Why not?” the Privy Councilor asked.

Frank Braun spoke softly and earnestly, “Because–because these things–are sacred.”

Then he left. He stepped out of the house and crossed the courtyard. The servant opened the gate and it rattled shut behind him.

Frank Braun walked down the street, stopped before the shrine of the Saint and examined it.

“Oh, Blessed Saint,” he said. “People bring you flowers and fresh oil for your lamps. But this house doesn’t care for you, doesn’t care if your shelter is preserved. You are regarded only as an antique. It is well for you that the folk still believe in you and in your power.”

Then he sang softly, reverently:

“ *John of Nepomuk*

Protector from dangerous floods.

Protect my house!

Guard it from rising waters.

Let them rage somewhere else.

John of Nepomuk

Protect my house!”

“Well old idol,” he continued. “You have it easy protecting this village from dangerous floods since the Rhine lays three quarters of an hour from here and since it is so regular and runs between stone levies.

But try anyway, John of Nepomuk. Try to save this house from the flood that shall now break over it! See, I love you, Saint of stone, because you are my mother’s patron Saint.

She is called Johanna Nepomucema, also called Hubertina so she will never get bitten by a mad dog. Do you remember how she came into this world in this house, on the day that is sacred to you? That is why she carries your name, John of Nepomuk! And because I love her, my Saint–I will warn you for her sake.

You know that tonight another Saint has come inside, an unholy one. A little manikin, not of stone like you and not beautifully enshrined and dressed in garments–It is only made of wood and pathetically naked. But it is as old as you, perhaps even older and people say that it has a strange power. So try, Saint Nepomuk, give us a demonstration of your power!

One of you must fall, you or the manikin. It must be decided who is Master over the house of Brinken. Show us, my Saint, what you can do.”

Frank Braun bowed, paid his respects, crossed himself, laughed shortly and went on with quick strides through the street. He came up to a field, breathed deeply the fresh night air and began walking toward the city. In an avenue under blooming chestnuts he slowed his steps, strolled dreamily, softly humming as he went along.

Suddenly he stopped, hesitated a moment. He turned around, looked quickly both ways, swung up onto a low wall, sprang down to the other side and, ran through a still garden up to a wide red villa.

He stopped there, pursed his lips and his wild short whistle chased through the night, twice, three times, one right after the other. Somewhere a hound began to bark. Above him a window softly opened, a blonde woman in a white nightgown appeared. Her voice whispered through the darkness.

“Is that you?”

And he said, “Yes, yes!”

She scurried back into the room, quickly came back again, took her handkerchief, wrapped something in it and threw it down.

“There my love–the key! But be quiet–very quiet! Don’t wake up my parents.”

Frank Braun took the key out, climbed the small marble steps, opened the door and went inside. While he groped softly and cautiously upward in the dark his young lips moved:

“ *John of Nepomuk*

Protector from dangerous floods.

Protect me from love!

Let it strike another

Leave me in earthly peace

John of Nepomuk

Protect me from love!”

Chapter Four

Gives the particulars of how they found Alraune's mother

FRANK Braun sat above on the ramparts of Festung Ehrenbreitstein, a fortified castle overlooking Koblentz. He had sat there for two months already and still had three more to sit, through the entire summer. Just because he had shot a hole through the air, and through his opponent as well.

He was bored. He sat up high on the parapet of the tower, legs dangling over the edge looking at the wide broad view of the Rhine from the steep cliffs. He looked into the blue expanse and yawned, exactly like his three comrades that sat next to him. No one spoke a word.

They wore yellow canvas jackets that the soldiers had given them. Their attendants had painted large black numbers on the backs of their jackets to signify their cells. No.'s two, fourteen and six sat there; Frank Braun wore the number seven.

Then a troop of foreigners came up into the tower, Englishmen and Englishwomen led by the sergeant of the watch. He showed them the poor prisoners with the large numbers sitting there so forlorn. They were moved with sympathy and with "oohs" and "ahs" asked the sergeant if they could give the miserable wretches anything.

"That is expressly forbidden," he said. "I better not see any of you doing it."

But he had a big heart and turned his back as he explained the region around them to the gentlemen.

“There is Koblenz,” he said, “and over there behind it is Neuwied. Down there is the Rhine–”

Meanwhile the ladies had come up. The poor prisoner stretched out his hands behind him, held them open right under his number. Gold pieces, cigarettes and tobacco were dropped into them, sometimes even a business card with an address.

That was the game Frank Braun had contrived and introduced up here.

“That is a real disgrace,” said No. fourteen. It was the cavalry captain, Baron Flechtheim.

“You are an idiot,” said Frank Braun. “What is disgraceful is that we fancy ourselves so refined that we give everything to the petty officers and don’t keep anything for ourselves. If only the damned English cigarettes weren’t so perfumed.”

He inspected the loot.

“There! Another Pound piece! The Sergeant will be very happy–God, I made out well today!”

“How much did you lose yesterday?” asked No. two.

Frank Braun laughed, “Pah, everything I made the day before plus a couple of blue notes. Fetch the executioner his block!”

No. six was a very young ensign, a young pasty faced boy that looked like milk and blood. He sighed deeply.

“I too have lost everything.”

“So, do you think we did any better?” No. fourteen snarled at him, “And to think those three scoundrels are now in Paris amusing themselves with our money! How long do you think they will stay?”

Dr. Klaverjahn, marine doctor, fortress prisoner No. two said, “I estimate three days. They can’t stay away any longer than that without

someone noticing. Besides, their money won't last that long!"

They were speaking of No.'s four, five and twelve who had heartily won last night, had early this morning climbed down the hill and caught the early train to Paris–"R and R"–a little rest and relaxation, is what they called it in the fortress.

"What will we do this afternoon?" No. fourteen asked.

"Will you just once think for yourself!" Frank Braun cried to the cavalry captain.

He sprang down from the wall, went through the barracks into the officer's garden. He felt grumpy, whistled to get inside. Not grumpy because he had lost the game, that happened to him often and didn't bother him at all. It was this deplorable sojourn up here, this unbearable monotony.

Certainly the fortress confinement was light enough and none of the gentlemen prisoners were ever injured or tormented. They even had their own casino up here with a piano and a harmonium. There were two dozen newspapers. Everyone had their own attendant and all the cells were large rooms, almost halls, for which they paid the government rent of a penny a day. They had meals sent up from the best guesthouses in the city and their wine cellar was in excellent condition.

If there was anything to find fault with, it was that you couldn't lock your room from the inside. That was the single point the commander was very serious about. Once a suicide had occurred and ever since any attempt to bring a bolt in brought severe punishment.

"It was idiotic thought," Frank Braun, "as if you couldn't commit suicide without bolts on your door!"

The missing bolt pained him every day and ruined all the joy in it by making it impossible to be alone in the fortress. He had shut his door with rope and chain, put his bed and all the other furniture in front of it. But it had been useless. After a war that lasted for hours everything in his room

was demolished and battered to pieces. The entire company stood triumphant in the middle of his room.

Oh what a company! Every single one of them was a harmless, kind and good-natured fellow. Every single one–to a man, could chat by themselves for half an hour–But together, together they were insufferable. Mostly, it was their comments, that they were all depressed. This wild mixture of officers and students forgot their high stations and always talked of the foolish happenings at the fortress. They sang, they drank, they played. One day, one night, like all the rest. In between were a few girls that they dragged up here and a few outings down to the town below. Those were their heroic deeds and they didn't talk about anything else!

The ones that had been here the longest were the worst, entirely depraved and caught up in this perpetual cycle. Dr. Burmüller had shot his brother-in-law dead and had sat up here for two years now. His neighbor, the Dragoon lieutenant, Baron von Vallendar had been enjoying the good air up here for a half year longer than that. And the new ones that came in, scarcely a week went by without them trying to prove who was the crudest and wildest–They were held in highest regard.

Frank Braun was held in high regard. He had locked up the piano on the second day because he didn't want to listen any more to the horrible "Song of Spring" the cavalry captain kept playing. He put the key in his pocket, went outside and then threw it over the fortress wall. He had also brought his dueling pistols with him and shot them all day long. He could guzzle and escape as well as anyone up here.

Really, he had enjoyed these summer months at the fortress. He had dragged in a pile of books, a new writing quill and sheets of writing paper, believing he could work here, looking forward to the constraint of the solitude. But he hadn't been able to open a book, had not written one letter.

Instead he had been pulled into this wild childish whirlpool that he loathed and went along with it day after day. He hated his comrades–every single one of them–

His attendant came into the garden, saluted:

“Herr Doctor, A letter for you.”

A letter? On Sunday afternoon? He took it out of the soldier’s hand. It was a special express letter that had been forwarded to him up here. He recognized the thin scrawl of his uncle’s handwriting. From him? What did his uncle suddenly want of him? He weighed the letter in his hand.

Oh, he was tempted to send the letter back, “delivery refused”. What was going on with the old professor anyway? Yes, the last time he had seen him was when he had traveled back to Lendenich with him after the celebration at the Gontrams. That was when he had tried to persuade his uncle to create an alraune creature. That was two years ago.

Ah, now it was all coming back to him! He had gone to a different university, had passed his exams. Then he had sat in a hole in Lorraine–busy as a junior attorney–Busy? Bah, he had set out in life thinking he would travel when he got out of college. He was popular with the women, and with those that loved a loose life and wild ways. His superior viewed him very unfavorably.

Oh yes, he worked, a bit here and there–for himself. But it was always what his superior called public nuisance cases. He sneaked away when he could, traveled to Paris. It was better at the house on Butte Sacrée than in court. He didn’t know for sure where it would all lead. It was certain that he would never be a jurist, attorney, judge or other public servant. But then, what should he do? He lived there, got into more debt every day–

Now he held this letter in his hand and felt torn between ripping it open and sending it back like it was as a late answer to a different letter his uncle had written him two years ago.

It had been shortly after that night. He had ridden through the village at midnight with five other students, back from an outing into the seven mountains. On a sudden impulse he had invited them all to a late midnight meal at the ten Brinken house.

They tore at the bell, yelled loudly and hammered against the wrought iron door making such a noise that the entire village came running out to

see what was happening. The Privy Councilor was away on a journey but the servant let them in on the nephew's command. The horses were taken to the stable and Frank Braun woke the household, ordered them to prepare a great feast. Frank Braun went into his uncle's cellar and brought out the finest wines.

They feasted, drank and sang, roared through the house and garden, made noises, howled and smashed things with their fists. Early the next morning they rode home, bawling and screaming, hanging on to their nags like wild cowboys, one or two flopping like old meal sacks.

"The young gentlemen behaved like pigs," reported Aloys to the Privy Councilor. Yet, that wasn't it. That wasn't what had made his uncle so angry. He didn't say anything about it.

On the buffet there had been some rare apples, dew fresh nectarines, pears and peaches out of his greenhouse. These precious fruits had been picked with unspeakable care, wrapped in cotton and laid on golden plates to ripen. But the students had no reverence at all for the professor's loves, were not respectful of anything that had been there. They had bitten into these fruits, then because they were not ripe, had put them back down on the plates. That was what he was angry about.

He wrote his nephew an embittered letter requesting him to never again set foot in his house. Frank Braun was just as deeply hurt over the reason for the letter, which he perceived as pathetically petty.

Ah yes, if he had gotten this letter, the one he was now holding, while living in Metz or even in Montmartre–he wouldn't have hesitated a second before giving it back to the messenger. But he was here–here in this horrible boredom of the fortress.

He decided.

"It will be a diversion in any case," he murmured as he opened the letter.

His uncle shared with him that after careful consideration he was willing to follow the suggestions his nephew had given him to the last letter. He already had a suitable candidate for the father. The stay of execution for the murderer Raul Noerrissen had been denied and he had no further appeals possible. Now his uncle was looking for a mother.

He had already made an attempt without success. Unfortunately it was not easy to find just the right one but time pressed and he was now asking for assistance in this matter from his nephew.

Frank Braun looked at his valet, “Is the letter courier still here?” he asked.

“At your command Herr Doctor, ” the soldier informed him.

“Tell him to wait. Here give him some drink money.”

He searched in his pockets and found a Mark piece. Then he hurried back to the prisoner’s quarter’s letter in hand. He had scarcely arrived at the barracks courtyard when the wife of the Sergeant-major came towards him with a dispatch.

“A telegram for you!” she cried.

It was from Dr. Petersen, the Privy Councilor’s assistant. It read:

“His Excellency has been at the Hotel de Rome in Berlin since the day before yesterday. Await reply if you can meet. With heartfelt greetings.”

His Excellency? So his uncle was now “ His Excellency” and that was why he was in Berlin–In Berlin–that was too bad. He would have much rather traveled to Paris. It would have been much easier to find someone there and someone better as well. All the same, Berlin it was. At least it would be an interruption of this wilderness.

He considered for a moment. He needed to leave this evening but didn’t have a penny to his name and his comrades didn’t either. He looked at the woman.

“Frau Sergeant-major–” he began. But no, that wouldn’t work. He finished, “Buy the man a drink and put it on my tab.”

He went to his room, packed his suitcase and commanded the boy to take it straight to the train station and wait for him there. Then he went down. The Sergeant-major, the overseer of the prison house, was standing in the door wringing his hands and almost broken up.

“You are about to leave, Herr Doctor,” he lamented, “and the other three gentlemen are already gone to Paris, not even in this country! Dear God, no good can come out of this. It will fall on me alone–I carry all the responsibility.”

“It’s not that bad,” answered Frank Braun. “I’m only going to be gone for a few days and the other gentlemen will be back soon.”

The Sergeant-major continued to complain, “It’s not my fault, most certainly not! But the others are so jealous of me and today Sergeant Bekker has the watch. He–”

“He will keep his mouth shut,” Frank Braun replied. “He just got over thirty Marks from us–charitable donations from the English–By the way, I’m going to the commander in Coblenz to ask for a leave of absence–Are you satisfied now?”

But the overseer of the prison was not satisfied. “What! To the commander? But Herr Doctor, you have no leave of absence to go down to the city, and you still want to go to the commander?”

Frank Braun laughed, “Yes indeed. Straight to him! Namely, I must go to the commander and pump some money out of him.”

The Sergeant-major didn’t say another word. He stood there not moving with a wide-open mouth, completely petrified.

“Give me ten pennies, boy,” Frank Braun cried to his valet, “for the toll bridge.”

He took the coins and went with quick strides across the yard, into the officer's garden and from there onto the slope leading up to the ramparts. He swung up onto the wall, grabbed the bough of a mighty ash tree on the other side and climbed down the trunk. Then he pushed through the thick underbrush and climbed down the rocks. In twenty minutes he was at the bottom.

It was the route they always took for their nightly escapades. He went along the Rhine to the toll bridge and then across to Coblenz. He learned where the commander lived and hurried there.

He showed the general the telegram and said that he came on very urgent matters. The general let him in and he put the telegram back in his pocket.

"How can I help you with this?"

Frank Braun said, "I need a leave of absence your Excellency. I am a prisoner at the fortress."

The old general stared at him unkindly, visibly annoyed at the intrusion.

"What do you want? By the way, how did you get down into the city? Do you have a pass?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency," said Frank Braun. "I have church leave."

He lied, but knew very well the general only wanted an answer. "I came to Your Excellency to ask for a three day pass. My uncle is in Berlin and dying."

The commander blurted out, "What is your uncle to me? It's entirely out of the question! You are not sitting up there at your convenience. It's because you have broken the law, do you understand? Anyone could come to me with a dying uncle or aunt. If it's not at least a parent I deny such a pass strictly on principle."

“I remain dutiful, your Excellency,” he replied. “I will inform my uncle, his Excellency, the Privy Councilor ten Brinken, immediately by telegraph that unfortunately his only nephew is not allowed to hasten to his deathbed for his weary eyes to look upon.”

He bowed, turned toward the door, but the general held him back as he had expected.

“Who is your uncle?” he asked in hesitation.

Frank Braun repeated the name and the beautiful title. Then he took the telegram out of his pocket and handed it over.

“My poor uncle has one last chance for deliverance in Berlin but unfortunately the operation is not successful very often.”

“Hmm,” said the commander. “Go my young friend. Go immediately. Perhaps it will be helpful.”

Frank Braun made a face, lamented and said, “Only God knows– Perhaps my prayers can do some good.”

He interrupted himself with a beautiful sigh and continued, “I remain dutiful, your Excellency. There is just one other thing I have to ask.”

The commander gave him the telegram back. “What?” he asked.

Frank Braun burst out, “I have no travel money. May I ask your Excellency to loan me three hundred Marks.”

The general looked suspiciously at him. “No money–Hmm–so no money either–But wasn’t yesterday the first? Didn’t your money come?”

“My money came promptly, your Excellency,” he replied quickly. “But it was gone just as quickly that night!”

The old commander laughed at that.

“Yes, yes. That is how you atone for your crimes, your misdeeds! So you need three hundred Marks?”

“Yes, your Excellency! My uncle will certainly be very happy to hear how you have helped me out of this predicament, if I am permitted.”

The general turned, went to the writing desk, opened it and took out three little pieces of paper and a moneybox. He gave the prisoner quill and paper and told him what to write down on the receipt. Then he gave him the money. Frank Braun took it with a light easy bow.

“I remain dutiful, your Excellency.”

“Think nothing of it,” said the commander. “Go there and come back right away–Give my compliments to yours truly, his Excellency.”

“Once again I remain dutiful, your Excellency.”

One last bow and he was outside. He sprang over the six front steps in one leap and had to restrain himself not to shout out loud. That was great!

He called a taxi to take him to the Ehrenbreitstein train station. There he leafed through the departure times and found he still had three hours to wait. He called to the valet that was waiting with his suitcase and commanded him to quickly run over to the “Red Cock” and bring back the ensign from Plessen.

“But bring the right one boy!” he said sharply. “The young gentleman that just got here not to long ago. The one that wears No. six on his back. The one that–Wait, your pennies have earned interest.”

He threw him a ten Mark piece. Then he went into the wine house, considered carefully, ordered a select supper and sat at the window looking out at the Sunday citizens as they wandered along the Rhine.

Finally the ensign came. “What’s up now?”

“Sit down,” said Frank Braun. “Shut up. Don’t ask. Eat, drink and be merry!”

He gave him a hundred Mark bill. Pay my bill with this. You can keep the rest–and tell them up there that I've gone to Berlin–with a pass! I want the Sergeant-major to know that I will be back before the end of the week."

The blonde ensign stared at him in outright admiration, "Just tell me–how did you do it?"

"My secret, " said Frank Braun. "But it wouldn't do you any good if I did tell you. His Excellency will only be good-natured enough to fall for it once. Prosit!"

The ensign brought him to the train and handed his suitcase up to him. Then he waved his hat and handkerchief.

Frank Braun stepped back from the window and forgot in that same instant the little ensign, his co-prisoners and the fortress. He spoke with the conductor, stretched out comfortably in his sleeper, closed his eyes and went to sleep. The conductor had to shake him very hard to wake him up.

"Where are we?" he asked drowsily.

"Almost to Friedrichstrasse station."

He gathered his things together, climbed out and went to the hotel. He got a room, bathed, changed clothes and then went down for breakfast. He ran into Dr. Petersen at the door.

"Oh there you are dear Doctor! His Excellency will be overjoyed!"

His Excellency! Again his Excellency! It sounded wrong to his ears.

"How is my uncle?" he asked. "Better?"

"Better?" repeated the doctor. "What do you mean better? His Excellency has not been sick!"

"Is that so," said Frank Braun. "Not sick! That's too bad. I thought uncle was on his deathbed."

Dr. Petersen looked at him very bewildered. “I don’t understand at all–”

He interrupted him, “It’s not important. I am only sorry that the Privy Counsellor is not on his deathbed. That would have been so nice! Then I would have inherited right? Unless he has disowned me. That is also very possible–even more likely.”

He saw the bewildered doctor standing before him and fed on his discomfort for a moment.

Then he continued, “But tell me doctor, since when has my uncle been called his Excellency?”

“It’s been four days, the opportunity–”

He interrupted him, “Only four days! And how many years now have you been with him–as his right hand?”

“Now that would be at least ten years now,” replied Dr. Petersen.

“And for ten years you have called him Privy Councilor and he has replied back to you. But now in these four days he has become so completely his Excellency to you that you can’t even think of him any other way than in the third person?”

“Permit me, Herr Doctor,” said the assistant doctor, intimidated and pleading. Permit me to–What do you mean anyway?”

But Frank Braun took him under the arm and led him to the breakfast table.

“Oh, I know that you are a man of the world doctor! One with form and manners–with an inborn instinct for proper behavior–I know that–and now doctor, let’s have breakfast and you can tell me what you have been up to in the meantime.”

Doctor Petersen gratefully sat down, thoroughly reconciled and happy that was over with. This young attorney that he had known as a young

schoolboy was quite a windbag and a true hothead–but he was the nephew–of his Excellency.

The assistant doctor was about thirty-six. He was average and Frank Braun thought that everything about him was “average”. His nose was not large or small. His features were not ugly or handsome. He was not young anymore and yet he wasn’t old. The color of his hair was exactly in the middle between dark and light. He wasn’t stupid or brilliant either, not exactly boring and yet not entertaining. His clothes were not elegant and yet not ordinary either.

He was a good “average” in all things and just the man the Privy Councilor needed. He was a competent worker, intelligent enough to grasp and do what was asked of him and yet not intelligent enough to know everything about this colorful game his master played.

“By the way, how much does my uncle pay you?” Frank Braun asked.

“Oh, not exactly splendid–but it is enough,” was the answer. “I’m happy with it. At New Years I was given a four hundred Mark raise.”

The doctor looked hungrily as the nephew began his breakfast with fruit, eating an apple and a handful of cherries.

“What kind of cigars do you smoke?” the attorney inquired.

“What I smoke? Oh, an average kind–Not too strong–he interrupted himself. But why do you ask doctor?”

“Only because,” said Frank Braun, “it interests me–But now tell me what you have already done in these things. Has the Privy Councilor shared his plans with you?”

“Certainly,” the doctor nodded proudly. “I am the only one that knows–except for you of course. This effort is of the highest scientific importance.”

The attorney cleared his throat, “Hmm–you think so?”

“Entirely without a doubt,” confirmed the doctor. “And his Excellency is so extremely gifted to have thought it all out, taking care of every possible problem ahead of time. You know how careful you have to be these days. The foolish public is always attacking us doctors for so many of our absolutely important experiments. Take vivisection–God, the people become sick when they hear the word. What about our experiments with germs, vaccines and so on? They are all thorns in the eyes of the public even though we almost always only work with animals. And now, this question of artificial insemination of people–

His Excellency has found the only possibility in an executed murderer and a paid prostitute. Even the people loving pastor would not have much against it.”

“Yes, it is a splendid idea,” Frank Braun confirmed. “It is well that you can recognize the capacity of your superior.”

Then Dr. Petersen reported how his Excellency had made several attempts in Cologne with his help. Unfortunately they had not had any success in finding an appropriate female. It turned out that these creatures in this class of the population had very different ideas about having to endure artificial insemination. It was nearly impossible to talk to them about it at all, much less persuade one to actually do it. It didn’t matter how eloquent his Excellency spoke or how hard he tried to make them understand that it would not be dangerous at all; that they would earn a nice piece of money and be doing the scientific community a great service. One had screamed loudly that she would rather service the entire scientific community–and made a very rude gesture.

“Pfui!” Frank Braun said. “If only she could!”

It was a very good thing that his Excellency had the opportunity to travel to Berlin for the Gynecological Conference. Here in the metropolis there would no doubt be a much wider selection to choose from. The women in question would not be as stupid as in the province, would have less superstitious fear of the new and be more open and practical regarding the money they could make and the important service they could provide to the advancement of science.

“Especially the last!” Frank Braun emphasized.

Dr. Petersen obliged him with:

“It is unbelievable how old fashioned their ideas are in Cologne! Every Guinea pig, yes, even every monkey is infinitely more insightful and reasonable than those females. I almost lost my faith in the towering intellect of humanity. I hope that here I can regain that shaken belief and make it solid once more.”

“There is no doubt about it,” the attorney encouraged him. “It would be a real shame indeed if Berlin’s prostitutes couldn’t do any better than Guinea-pigs and monkeys!

By the way, when is my uncle coming? Is he up already?”

“Oh, he’s been up for a long time now,” declared the assistant doctor zealously. “His Excellency left immediately. He had a ten o’clock audience at the Ministry.”

“And after that?” Frank Braun asked.

“I don’t know how long it will last,” reasoned Doctor Petersen. “In any case his Excellency requested I wait for him in the auditorium at two o’clock. Then at five o’clock his Excellency has another important meeting with a Berlin colleague here in the hotel and around seven his Excellency is invited to eat with the university president.

Herr Doctor, perhaps you could meet in between–”

Frank Braun considered. Basically he was in favor of his uncle being occupied the entire day. Then his uncle wouldn’t be around to interfere with his day.

I want you to deliver a message to my uncle,” he said. “Tell him we will meet up downstairs in the hotel around eleven o’clock.”

“Around eleven o’clock?” The assistant doctor made a somewhat dubious face. “Isn’t that a little late? His Excellency is in the habit of going

to bed around that time and after such a strenuous day."

"His Excellency must exert himself a little bit longer today doctor." Frank Braun decided. "Deliver the message. The hour is certainly not too late for our purpose. It's almost too early–In fact, it would be better if it were twelve o'clock instead–That way if poor uncle is too tired he can rest a bit ahead of time. Goodbye Doctor–until this evening."

He stood up, nodded curtly and left. He bit his teeth together, feeling at the same moment as his lips closed just how childish, how much of a mad mess it all was. He was almost ashamed of how he had treated the good doctor, how small he had been, how cheap his joke was. All of his nerves and sinews screamed for action–and instead he let his thistle headed brain scatter in a thousand directions–while he played childish pranks!

Dr. Petersen watched him go.

"He is full of pride," he said to himself. "Not once did he offer to shake my hand."

He ordered another coffee, added a little cream and deliberated while smearing butter on another slice of bread.

Then with innermost conviction, "Pride goes before the fall!"

Very satisfied with this wholesome common wisdom he bit into the white bread and raised the cup to his mouth.

It was closer to one o'clock that evening when Frank Braun finally appeared.

"Excuse me uncle," he said lightly.

"Now dear nephew," replied the Privy Councilor. "We have been waiting way too long!"

"I had something better to do uncle, and by the way you are not waiting here because of me but only because of your purpose."

The professor squinted over at him. “Youngster–” he began, but he controlled himself. “No, let it go. I am grateful that you have come here to help me nephew. Are you ready to go now?”

“No,” declared Frank Braun blinded in childish defiance. “I will have a whiskey soda first. We have enough time.”

That was his nature now, driving everything to the limit, sensitive and thin skinned to every little word, taking offence at even the slightest provocation. He always said harsh things to others but couldn’t endure the softest rebuke or criticism himself. He could feel how the old gentleman was hurt by his actions but knew the real reason his uncle was hurt was because he needed his stupid young nephew, that is what really sickened and offended his uncle.

It almost felt like a put down that the Privy Councilor was so completely oblivious, couldn’t see through the shabby surface behavior, couldn’t understand the blonde defiance for what it really was. While he on the other hand had to resist whether he wanted to or not, be more of a pirate than he really was, pull the mask still tighter and go his insolent way like he had discovered on the Montmartre, shock the bourgeois.

He leisurely emptied his glass, then stood up negligently like a bored, melancholy prince, “Whenever you gentlemen are ready.”

He looked down on his guests from above as if they were infinitely beneath him.

“Innkeeper, a cab.”

They left. The Privy Councilor was quiet, his upper lip hung down deeply, fat tear ducts drained over his cheeks. His mighty ears stuck out on both sides and the glittering right eye shone green in the dark.

“He looks like an owl,” thought Frank Braun. “Like an ugly old owl searching for a mouse.”

Dr. Petersen sat open mouthed in the front seat. He couldn't comprehend the unbelievable behavior of the nephew towards his uncle.

It wasn't long before the young man once more found his equilibrium– Why should he get angry at the old ass? In the end his good side came out as he helped the Privy Councilor out of the cab.

"Here we are," he cried. "Please step inside."

"Café Stern" it said on the large sign illuminated with electric lights. They went inside, down long rows of small marble tables and through a crowd of noisy and yelling people. Finally they sat down. This was a good place. Many women sat around all decked out with enormous hats and colorful silk blouses, multitudes of flesh waiting for customers. They were spread out lounging around like window displays.

"Is this one of the better places?" the Privy Councilor asked.

The nephew shook his head. "No Uncle Jakob, not at all. We wouldn't find what we wanted there–This might even be too good. We need the bottom dregs."

In the back a man in a greasy tight fitting suit sat at a piano continually playing one popular song after another. At times a few drinkers bellowed out words to the songs until the bouncer came over to quiet them down and tell them that this was a respectable place and they couldn't do that.

Little clerks ran around and a couple good citizens from the province sat at a nearby table making advances and talking dirty to the prostitutes. A waiter swung between the tables bringing an unappetizing brown sauce in glasses and a yellow one in cups. It was called bouillon and the other Melange. He also carried a full carafe of schnapps with little striped shot glasses.

Two women came up to their table and asked for coffee. It was no big deal; they just sat down and ordered.

"The blonde perhaps?" whispered Dr. Petersen.

But the attorney waved him away. “No, no not at all–She is only flesh. Not much better than your monkeys.”

A short one in the back of the room caught his eye. She was dark and her eyes seethed with eagerness. He stood up and waved to her. She loosened herself from her companion and came over to him.

“Listen–” he began.

But she said, “Not tonight, I already have a gentleman–Tomorrow if you want.”

“Get rid of him,” he urged. “Come with us. We are looking for something special.”

That was tempting. “Tomorrow– can’t it wait until tomorrow darling? I really can’t tonight. He’s an old customer. He paid twenty Marks.”

Frank Braun gripped her arm, “I will pay much more, a lot more. Do you understand? You will have it made. It’s not for me–It’s for the old man over there. He wants something special.”

She stopped. Her gaze followed his eyes to the Privy Councilor. “Him, over there?”

She sounded disappointed. “What would he be wanting?”

“Lucy,” screamed the man at her table.

“I’m coming,” she answered. “Not tonight. We can talk about it tomorrow if you want. Come back here around this time.”

“Stupid woman,” he whispered.

“Don’t be angry. He will kill me if I don’t go with him tonight. He’s always that way when he’s drunk. Come tomorrow–do you hear me? And leave the old man–Come alone. You won’t need to pay if you don’t like it.”

She left him standing and ran over to her table.

Frank Braun saw how the dark gentleman with the starched felt hat bitterly reproached her. Oh yes, she had to remain true to him–for tonight. He went through the hall slowly looking at the prostitutes but couldn't find any that looked corrupt enough. There was still a last residue of self-respect, some instinctive certainty of belonging to some other class of society.

No, there were none of the lowest of the low. The pert and saucy ones that had their own way, that knew what they wanted to be, whores. He could hardly define what it was that he was looking for. It was a feeling. She must love what she does, he thought, and want no other. She would not be like these others that through some chance unfortunate coincidence had wound up here.

These upright little women would have been workers, waitresses, secretaries or even telephone operators if their lives had only been just a little bit different. They were only prostitutes because the coarse greed of males made it that way.

No, the one he was looking for should be a prostitute. Not because she couldn't be anything else, but because every inch of her body screamed for new embraces. Because under the caresses of one lover, her soul already longed for the kisses of another. She needed to be a prostitute just like he– he hesitated. What was he? Tired and resigned, he finished his thought, just like he needed to be a dreamer.

He returned back to the table, "Come uncle. She is not here. We will go some other place."

The Privy Councilor protested but his nephew wouldn't listen.

"Come uncle," he repeated. "I promised you that I would find someone and I will find her."

They stood up, paid, went across the street and then further to the north.

"Where," asked Dr. Petersen.

The attorney didn’t answer, just kept walking, and looking at the big signs on the coffeehouses. Finally he stopped.

“Café–Drinks–Gentlemen,” he murmured. “That would be right.”

These dirty rooms were furnished in every style imaginable. To be sure, the little white marble tables stood here as well and plush red sofas were stuck against the walls. The rooms were lit with the same electric bulbs and the same flat-footed waiters shoved through the crowd in sticky suit coats.

But there was no pretense. Everything appeared just as it really was. The air was bad, smoky and stuffy, but when you breathed it in you felt better and freer somehow. There was no constraint and students sat at nearby tables drinking their beer and talking dirty with the women. They were all confident, sure of themselves, as mighty floods of filth flowed out of their lips. One of them, small and fat with a face full of dueling scars appeared inexhaustible and the women neighed and bent over writhing with resounding laughter.

Pimps sat around on the walls playing cards or sitting alone, staring at the drunken musicians and whistling along while drinking their schnapps. Once in awhile a prostitute would come in, go up to one of them, speak a few hurried words and then disappear again.

“This will do!” Frank Braun said. He waved to the waiter, ordered cherry water and told him to send a few women over to the table. Four came but as they sat down he saw another going out the door, a tall, strong woman in a white silk blouse with luxurious fiery red hair springing out from under a little hat. He leaped up and rushed out into the street after her.

She went up the road slowly, indolently, lightly rocking her hips. She curved to the left and entered into a doorway. Glowing red letters arched over it, “North Pole Dance Hall”. He stepped across the dirty yard after her and entered into the smoky hall almost the same time she did but she didn’t notice. She stood standing out in front looking over the dancing crowd.

It was noisy with yells and shouts; men and women whirled around moving their legs till the dust flew high as the harsh words of the Rix Dorfer howled through the music. It was rough, crude and wild as the dancers pushed through each other and the crowd was certainly growing.

He liked the Croquette and the Likette that they danced over on the Montmartre and in the Latin Quarter on the other side of the Seine and fell into them easily. They were lighter, more grand and full of charm. There was none of that in this shoving, seething mass, not the slightest twinge of what the French girls called “focus”.

But a hot blood screamed out of the Rix Dorfer, a wild passion was driving the dancers crazy throughout the dance hall. The music stopped and the dance master collected money in his dirty sweaty hands from the women, not from the men. Then he bowed to the audience and gestured grandly for the band in the gallery to start a new dance.

But the crowd didn’t want the Rhinelander. They screamed at the conductor, yelling at him to stop but the orchestra played on battling against the will of the dance hall, secure high above and behind their balustrade.

Then the Maitre pressed out onto the floor. He knew his women and his fellows, held them solidly in his hand and would not be intimidated by drunken yells or threatening raised fists. But he also knew when he had to give in.

“Play the Emil,” he called up. “Play Emil!”

A fat female in a huge hat wound her arm around the dance master’s dusty suit coat.

“Bravo, Justav. That was well done!”

His influence spread like oil over the raging crowd. They laughed, pressed onto the dance floor, cried “Bravo”, and slapped him whole heartedly on the back or playfully punched him in the belly. Then, as the waltz began he broke out in song, screaming and hoarse:

“ Emil, you are a plant,

You climb all over me!

Are always quick to kiss

And that’s why I love you!”

“Alma,” cried out someone in the middle of the room. “There’s Alma!”

He left his partner standing, sprang up and grabbed the red haired prostitute by the arm. He was a short dark fellow with smooth hair curling tight against his forehead and bright piercing eyes.

“Come,” he cried, grabbing her tightly around the waist.

The prostitute danced. More daring than the others, she pranced the waltz letting her partner whirl her quickly around. After a few beats she was completely into the dance, throwing her hips around, bending forward and backward, pressing her body up against her partner in constant contact. It was shameless, vulgar and brutally sensual.

Frank Braun heard a voice near him, saw the dance master watching the prostitute with keen appreciation.

“Damn, that whore can swing her ass!”

Oh yes, she could swing her ass! She swung it high and cheeky like a flag, like a storm filled banner of naked lust, like the Baroness Gudel de Gudelfeld swung hers for the applause of the Crown Prince.

She doesn’t need any ornaments thought Frank Braun as his eyes followed her down the hall and back. He quickly stepped up to her as the music stopped and laid his hand on her arm.

“Pay first,” the dark haired man laughed at him.

He gave the man a coin. The prostitute looked him over with a quick look, examining him from top to bottom.

“I live nearby,” she said. “Scarcely three minutes in the–”

He interrupted her, “It doesn’t matter where you live, come with me.”

In the meantime back in the café the Privy Councilor offered the women something to drink. They wanted sherry brandy and asked if he could possibly pay their other tab, two beers, pancakes and a cup of coffee. The Privy Councilor paid, then tried his luck. He had a proposal to make and they might be interested he said. But only one of them could accept his very profitable offer and they would have to throw dice to see who got it.

Thin Jenny laid her arm on his shoulder. “We better roll those dice quick old man, that’s for sure! The ladies and I–we want to know what an old goat like you can teach us in bed that we don’t already know!”

Elly, a petite doll headed blonde seconded her.

“What my friend means is don’t waste our time. Bring on the money!”

She sprang up and got some dice. “Now children, let’s find out who gets to accept the old man’s proposal.”

But fat Anna, the one they called “The Hen”, protested.

“I always lose at dice,” she said. “Won’t you pay some consolation money, uncle, for the ones that don’t win?”

“Certainly,” said the Privy Councilor. “Five marks for each of you.”

He laid three fat pieces of silver on the table.

“You are swell!” Jenny praised him and confirmed it by ordering another round of Sherry-Brandy. She was also the winner. She took the three pieces of money and handed them to the others.

“There, you have your consolation money. Now open up you old rascal and tell me all of the shameful things that you want me to do. I am prepared.”

“Then listen dear child,” began the Privy Councilor. “It concerns some very unusual things–”

“You are a man, aren’t you?” the prostitute interrupted him. “I’m not a virgin anymore and haven’t been one for a long time. Our dear God has some strange beasts running around in his zoo and I’ve picked up a few things along the way. It will be hard to show me something new.”

“But you don’t understand me at all, dear Jenny,” said the Professor. “I demand nothing like that of you at all. I want you to take part in a scientific experiment.”

“I knew it,” Jenny blurted out. “I knew it–You are a Doctor aren’t you old man?–I had a Doctor once that always began with scientific experiments–He was the greatest pig of them all!–Now Prosit, uncle. That’s fine with me. I will fulfill all of your delightful fantasies.”

The Privy Councilor toasted and drank to her.

“We shall see soon enough how free from prejudice you really are–To make it short, this concerns an experiment with artificial insemination.”

“A what?” the girl started. “Artificial–insemination? What’s the need for that?–The common way seems to work well enough!”

The dark haired Clara grinned.

“I think it would be better to have an experiment to prevent pregnancy.”

Dr. Petersen came to his master’s aid.

“Will you permit me to try and explain to them?”

When the Privy Councilor nodded he gave a little lecture about the basic concept, the results that had been obtained so far and the possibilities for the future. He stressed sharply that the procedure was completely painless and that all the animals they had worked with up to now had remained completely healthy.

“What kind of animals?” Jenny asked.

The assistant doctor answered, “Up until now only rats, monkeys and guinea-pigs – ”

That set her off, “Guinea-pigs!–I might be a pig–I’ve been called an old sow! But no one has ever called me a Guinea pig! And you, you fat headed old hedgehog, want me to allow you to treat me like a Guinea pig?–Never, do you understand! That is something Jenny Lehman will not do!”

The Privy Councilor tried to calm her down, gave her another schnapps.

“You don’t understand dear child–” he began.

But she wouldn’t let him finish.

“I understand well enough,” she said. “I should give myself up to some greasy beast–or be inoculated with some filthy serum–or germ–I might even end up on your vivisection table.”

She was getting into it now, becoming overcome with anger and passion.

“Or I should bring some monster into this world that you can show at the circus! A child with two heads and a rat’s tail or one that looks half Guinea pig–I know where they abort such monstrous things–and you want to breed them. I should give myself up for that? Let you artificially inseminate me?–Look out old pig–here is what I think of your artificial insemination.”

She sprang up, bent over the table and spit into the Privy Councilor's face. Then she raised the little glass, quietly drank it, turned quickly around and proudly walked away.

At the same moment Frank Braun appeared in the door and waved for them to come outside.

"Come here Herr Doctor, come here quick!" Dr. Petersen called out to him as he was trying to wipe the Privy Councilor clean.

"Now what's going on?" the attorney asked as he stepped up to the table.

The professor squinted at him. He appeared to be bitter and angry. The three prostitutes were shouting in confusion as Dr. Petersen explained what had happened.

"What should we do now?" he finished.

Frank Braun shrugged his shoulders, "Do? Nothing at all. Pay and go–nothing else–By the way, I've found what we need."

They went out. The red haired prostitute stood in front of the door waving down a taxi with her parasol. Frank Braun pushed her inside, then let the Privy Councilor and his assistant climb in. He called out the address to the coachman and climbed in with the others.

"Permit me to make introductions," he cried. "Miss Alma–his Excellency Privy Councilor ten Brinken–and the good doctor Herr Karl Petersen."

"Are you crazy?" The professor began.

"Not at all Uncle Jakob," said the attorney quietly. "Fräulein Alma will learn your name anyway if she stays for a long time at your home or your clinic whether you like it or not."

He turned to the prostitute, "Excuse me, Fräulein Alma. My uncle is a little old!"

He couldn’t see the Privy Councilor in the dark but he could clearly hear how his uncle pressed his wide lips together in impotent rage. It pleased him and he thought that his uncle would finally loose it but he was wrong. The Privy Councilor remained calm.

“So have you already told the young lady what this is about? Does she understand?”

Frank Braun laughed in his face. “She has no idea! I have not spoken a word about it, have only been with Fräulein Alma scarcely a hundred steps from across the street–I’ve scarcely spoken ten words with her–but I have seen how she dances–”

“But Herr Doctor,” the assistant doctor interrupted him. After what we have just experienced wouldn’t it be better to let her know?”

“Dear Petersen,” the attorney said arrogantly. “Calm down. I am convinced that this is just the girl we need and I think that is enough.”

The coach stopped in front of a wine locale and they entered. Frank Braun asked for a private room in the back and the waiter led them to one. Then he looked at the wine selection and ordered two bottles of Pommery and a bottle of cognac.

“Hurry up!” he cried.

The waiter brought the wine and left. Frank Braun closed the door. Then he stepped up to the prostitute.

“Please Fräulein Alma, may I take your hat?”

She gave him her hat and her wild, unpinned hair cascaded down and curled around her forehead and cheeks. Her face was clear with just a few freckles and her green eyes shimmered. Small rows of bright teeth shone out between thin pale lips and she was surrounded by a consuming, almost unnatural sensuality.

“Take off your blouse,” he said.

She obeyed quietly. He loosened both buttons of her shift at the shoulders and pulled it down to reveal two almost classically formed breasts that were only a little too firm. Frank Braun glanced over at his uncle.

“That will be enough,” he said. “The rest will look just as good. Her hips certainly leave nothing more to desire.”

Then he turned back to the prostitute. “Thank you Alma. You may get dressed again.”

The girl obeyed, took the cup that he offered and emptied it. During that hour he made sure that her cup never stood empty for more than a minute. Then he chatted with her. He talked about Paris, spoke of beautiful women at the de la Galette in Moulin and at the Elysée in Montmartre. He described exactly how they looked, described their shoes, their hats and their dresses. Then he turned to the prostitute.

“You know Alma, it is really a shame to see you running around here. Please don’t think badly of me but haven’t I seen you before somewhere else? Were you ever in the Union Bar or the Arcadia?”

No, she had never been in them or in the Amour Hall. Once she had gone with a gentleman to the old Ballroom but when she went back alone

the next night she was turned away at the door because she wasn't dressed properly.

"Of course you need to be dressed properly," Frank Braun confirmed. "Do you think you will ever again stand all dressed up in front of that ballroom door?"

The prostitute laughed, "It doesn't really matter–a man is a man!"

He paid no attention and told her fabulous stories of women that had made their fortunes in the great ballrooms. He spoke of beautiful pearl necklaces and large diamonds, carriages and teams of white horses. Then suddenly he asked.

"Tell me, how long have you been running around here?"

She said quietly, "It's been four years since I ran away from home."

He questioned her, pulled out of her bit by bit what he wanted to know. He drank with her, filling her glass and pouring cognac into her champagne without her noticing. She was almost twenty years old and had come from Halberstadt. Her father was an honest Baker, honorable and distinguished like her mother and like her six sisters.

She had first lain with a man a few days after her confirmation. He was an associate of her father's. Had she loved him? Not at all–well only when– yes and then there was another and then another. Both her father and her mother had beaten her but she would still run off and stay out all night. It went on like that for a year – until one day her parents threw her out. Then she pawned her watch and traveled to Berlin. She had been here ever since–

Frank Braun said, "Yes, yes. That is quite a story." Then he continued, "But now, today is your lucky day!"

"Really," she asked. "Why do you say that?"

Her voice rang hoarse like it was under a veil, "One day is just a good as another to me–All I need is a man, nothing else!"

But he knew how to get her interest, “But Alma, you have to be contented with any man that wants you! Wouldn’t you like it if it were the other way around?–If you could have anyone that you wanted?”

Her eyes lit up at that. “Oh yes, I would really like that!”

He laughed, “Well have you ever met anyone on the street that you wanted and he wouldn’t give you the time of day? Wouldn’t it be great if you could choose him instead?”

She laughed, “You, my boy. I would really like to–”

“Me as well,” he agreed. “Then and any time you wanted. But you can only do that when you have money and that is why I said that today is your lucky day because you can earn a lot of money today if you want.”

“How much,” she asked.

He said, “Enough money to buy you all the dresses and jewelry that will get you into the finest and most distinguished ballrooms. How much?–Let’s say ten thousand–or make it twelve thousand Marks.”

“What!” gasped the assistant doctor.

The professor, who had never even considered such a sum snapped, “You seem to be somewhat free with other people’s money.”

Frank Braun laughed in delight. “Do you hear that Alma, how the Privy Councilor is beside himself over the sum that he should give you? But I must tell you that it is not free. You will be helping him and he should help you as well. Is fifteen thousand alright with you?”

She looked at him with enormous eyes.

“Yes, but what do I need to do for it?”

“That is the thing that is so funny,” he said. “You don’t need to do anything right now, only wait a little bit. That’s all.”

She drank, “Wait?” She cried gaily, “I’m not very good at waiting. But if I must for fifteen thousand Marks I will! Prosit boy!” and she emptied her glass.

He quickly filled it up again.

“It is a splendid story,” he declared. “There is a gentleman, he is a count–well, really a prince, a good looking fellow. You would really like him. But unfortunately you can’t see him. They have him in prison and he will be executed soon. The poor fellow, especially since he is as innocent as you or I. He is just somewhat irascible and that’s how the misfortune happened. While he was intoxicated he got into a quarrel with his best friend and shot him. Now he must die.”

“What should I do?” She asked quickly. Her nostrils quivered. Her interest in this curious prince was fully aroused.

“You,” he continued. “You can help him fulfil his last wish–”

“Yes,” she cried quickly. “Yes, yes!–He wants to be with a woman one more time right? I will do it, do it gladly–and he will be satisfied with me!”

“Well done, Alma,” said the attorney. “Well done. You are a good girl–but things are not that simple. Pay attention so you understand.

After he had stabbed–I mean shot his friend to death he ran to his family. They should have protected him, hid him, helped him to escape but they didn’t do that at all. They knew how immensely rich he was and thought there was a good possibility that they would inherit everything from him so they called the police instead.”

“The Devil!” Alma said with conviction.

“Yes, they did,” he continued. “It was frightfully mean of them. So he was imprisoned and what do you think he wants now?”

“Revenge,” she replied promptly.

He clapped her approvingly on the shoulder.

“That’s right Alma. I see you have read all the right books. So he is determined to get revenge on his treacherous family and the only way to do it was to cut them off from his inheritance. You understand everything so far don’t you?”

“Naturally I understand,” she declared. “It would serve them right.”

“But how to do it,” he continued. “That was the question. After long deliberation he found the only possible way. The only way he could prevent his millions to be taken was if he had a child of his own!”

“Does the prince have one?” she asked.

“No,” he answered. “Unfortunately he has none. But he still lives. There is still time–”

Her breath flew and her breasts heaved quickly, “I understand,” she cried. “I can have the prince’s child.”

“That’s right,” he said. “Will you?”

And she screamed, “Yes I will.”

She threw herself back in the lounge chair, spread out her legs and opened her arms wide. A heavy lock of red hair fell down onto her neck. Then she sprang up, emptied her glass again.

“It’s hot in here,” she said. “–Very hot!”

She tore her blouse off and fanned herself with a handkerchief.

He held her glass out to her. “Would you like some more? Come, we will drink to the prince!”

Their glasses clinked together.

“A nice robber story you tell there,” hissed the Privy Councilor to his nephew. “I am curious how it comes out.”

“Have no fear, Uncle Jakob,” he came back. “There is still another chapter.”

Then he turned again to the red haired prostitute.

“Well then, that is what it’s all about Alma. That’s how you can help us. But there is still a problem that I must explain to you. As you know, the baron–”

“She interrupted him, “The baron? I thought he was a prince?”

“Naturally he is a prince,” confirmed Frank Braun. “But when he is incognito he calls himself baron– That’s the way it is with princes.

Now then, his Highness, the prince–”

“His Highness?” she whispered.

“Certainly,” he cried. “Highness like King or Kaiser! But you must swear that you will not talk about it–not to any one–So then, the prince is in disgrace now in a dungeon and heavily guarded at all times. No one is permitted to see him except his attorney. It is highly unlikely that he will be able to be with a woman before his last hour.”

“Oh,” she sighed.

Her interest in the unlucky prince was visibly less but Frank Braun paid no attention.

“There,”–he declaimed totally unperturbed in a voice ringing with pathos–, “deep in his heart, in his terrible need, in his dreadful despair and unquenchable thirst for revenge he suddenly thought about the strange experiments of his Excellency, the genuine Privy Councilor, Professor, Doctor, ten Brinken, the shining light of science.

The young handsome prince, now in the spring of his life, still remembered well his golden boyhood and the good old gentleman that looked after him when he had whooping cough and that sent him bon-bons

when he was sick–There he sits, Alma. Look at him, the instrument of the unlucky prince's revenge!"

He waved with grand gestures toward his uncle.

"That worthy Gentleman there," he continued, "has in his time advanced medical knowledge many miles. You know how children come into the world Alma, and you also know how they are created. But you don't know the secret mysteries of life that this benefactor of humanity has discovered! He knows how to create children without the mother and father ever seeing each other! The noble prince would be at peace in his dungeon or at rest in his fresh grave knowing that you, dear girl, with the good help of this old gentleman and under the expert care of this good Doctor Petersen will become the mother of his child."

Alma looked across over at the Privy Councilor. She didn't like this sudden shift, this weird transformation of turning a handsome wellborn prince into an old and very ugly professor. It didn't appeal to her at all.

Frank Braun noticed as well and began a new line of persuasion, trying to get her to think of something else.

"Naturally the prince's child, Anna, your child, must remain hidden after it comes into this world. He must remain hidden until he is fully-grown to protect him from the persecution and intrigue of his evil family–Naturally he would be a prince, just like his father."

"My child would be a prince?" she whispered.

"Yes, of course," he confirmed. "Or maybe a princess. That is something we can not know. It will inherit the castle, the grounds and several millions in money. But you will not be permitted to force yourself on him and compromise everything."

That did it. Fat tears ran down her cheeks. She was already in her role, feeling the grief and sorrow of having to give up her beloved child. She was a prostitute, but her child would be a prince! She couldn't be in his life. She

would have to remain quiet, suffer and endure everything–for her child. It would never know who its mother was.

A heavy sob seized her, shook her entire body. She threw herself over the table, buried her head in her arms and wept bitterly.

Tenderly, almost lovingly he laid his hand on her neck softly stroking her wild loose hair. He could taste the sugar water in the lemonade that he had mixed as well and took her very seriously in this moment.

“Magdalena,” he whispered to her. “Magdalena–”

She righted herself, stuck her hand out to him.

“I promise you that I will never press myself on him. He will never hear me or see me, but–but–”

“What is it girl?” he asked softly.

She grabbed his arm, fell onto her knees in front of him and buried her head in his lap.

“Only once–only once!” she cried. “Can’t I see him just one time? From a distance–perhaps out of a window?”

“Will you finish this trashy comedy,” the Privy Councilor threw at him.

Frank Braun looked wildly at him–and knew his uncle was right but something in his blood rebelled and he hissed back:

“Quiet you old fool! Don’t you see how beautiful this is?”

He bent back down over the prostitute, “Yes, girl. You shall see him, your young prince. I will take you along when he leads his soldiers for the first time, or to the theater when he is sitting above in the box–You can see him then–”

She didn’t answer, but she squeezed his hand and tears mixed in with her kisses. Then he slowly straightened her up, carefully set her back in the chair and gave her some more to drink. It was a large glass half full of cognac.

“Will you do it?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said softly. “I will–What should I do?”

He reflected a moment, “First–first–we will draw up a little contract.”

He turned to the assistant doctor.

“Do you have some paper, doctor? And a quill? Good! Then you can write. Write everything twice, if you please.”

He dictated, said that the undersigned of their own free will would agree to be at the disposal of his Excellency ten Brinken for the purpose of this experiment. She would solemnly promise to faithfully obey all the orders of this gentleman. And further, that after the birth of the child she would completely renounce all claim to it.

In return his Excellency would immediately place fifteen thousand Marks into a savings account in the name of the undersigned and turn this account over to her upon the delivery of the child. He would further provide for her maintenance and support up to that time and carry all costs as well as giving her a monthly allowance of one hundred Marks to use as she pleased.

He took the paper and read it out loud one time.

“It doesn’t say anything about the prince!” she said.

“Naturally it doesn’t,” he declared. “That must remain highly secret.”

She could see that, but there was still something that bothered her.

“Why–” she asked. “Why did you pick me? Any woman would gladly do what she could for the poor prince.”

He hesitated. This question was a little unexpected but he found an answer.

“Well, you know,” he began. “it is like this–The prince’s childhood sweetheart was a very beautiful duchess. He loved her with all his heart as only a real prince can love and she loved the handsome young noble just as much. But she died.”

“How did she die?” Alma asked.

“She died of–of the measles. The prince’s beloved had golden red hair just like yours. She looked exactly like you. The prince’s last wish is that the mother of his child look like the beloved of his youth. He gave us her picture and described her to us exactly. We searched all over Europe and never found the right one–until tonight when we saw you.”

She was flattered and laughed. “Do I really look like the beautiful duchess?”

He cried, “You could have been sisters!–By the way, can we take your photograph? It would make the prince very happy to see your picture!”

He handed the writing quill over to her, “Now sign, child!”

She took the paper and wrote “Al–” Then she stopped.

“There is a fat hair in the quill.”

She took a napkin and cleaned the quill with it.

“Damn–” murmured Frank Braun. “It occurs to me that she is not yet an adult. Legally we must also have her father’s signature–Oh well, this will do for the contract. Just write!–By the way, what is your father’s name?”

She said, “My father is Master Baker Raune in Halberstadt.”

Then she wrote her father’s name in clumsy slanting letters. Frank Braun took the paper out of her hand and looked at it. He let it fall and picked it up again staring at it.

“By all that’s Holy,” he cried out loud. “That–that is–”

“What’s the matter now, Herr Doctor?” asked the assistant doctor.

He handed the contract over to him, “There–there–look at the signature.”

Dr. Petersen looked at the sheet of paper.

“So,” he asked puzzled. “I don’t see anything remarkable about it.”

“No, no. Naturally not, you wouldn’t,” cried Frank Braun. “Give the contract to the Privy Councilor. Now read that, Uncle Jakob!”

The professor examined the signature. The girl had forgotten to finish writing her first name. “Al Raune” was written on the paper.

“Of all things–A remarkable coincidence,” said the professor.

He folded both sheets carefully together and stuck them in his breast pocket.

But his nephew cried, “A coincidence?–Well it might be a coincidence–Everything that is remarkable and mysterious is just a coincidence to you!”

He rang for the waiter.

“Wine, wine,” he cried. “Give me something to drink– Alma Raune–Al Raune, if you will.”

He sat down at the table and leaned over toward the Privy Councilor.

“Uncle Jakob, do you remember old Councilor to the Chamber of Commerce Brunner from Cologne and his son whom he named Marco? We had classes together in school even though he was a couple of years older than I was.

He father named him Marco as a joke and now the boy goes through life as Marco Brunner! Now here is the coincidence. The old Councilor to the Chamber of Commerce is the most sober man in the world and so is his wife. So are all of their children. I believe the only thing they drank in their house at Neumarkt was water, milk, tea and coffee.

But Marco drank. He drank a lot even as an upper level student. We often brought him home drunk. Then he became an ensign and then a lieutenant–that was it. He drank more and more. He did stupid things and was put away. Three times his father had him placed into treatment centers and three times he came out. Within a few weeks he was drinking more than ever.

Now comes the coincidence. He, Marco Brunner, drank–Marcobrunner! That was his obsession. He went into all the wine houses in the city searching for his label. He traveled around on the Rhine drinking up all that he could find of his wine. He drank up the sizable fortune that he had received from his grandmother.

‘Hey everyone,’ he screamed in his delirium. ‘Why does Marco Brunner polish off Marcobrunner? Because Marcobrunner polishes off Marco Brunner!’

The people laughed over his joke–It was all a joke – all a coincidence; just like all of life is a joke and a coincidence.

But I know that the old Councilor for the Chamber of Commerce would have given many hundreds of thousands if he had never made that joke–I also know that he has never forgiven himself for naming his poor son Marco and not Hans or Peter.

In spite of all that it is still a coincidence–a very foolish, grotesque coincidence like this scribbling of the prince’s bride.”

The girl was standing up drunkenly, steadying herself with her hand on the chair.

“The prince’s bride–” she babbled. “Get me the prince in bed!”

She took the bottle of cognac, poured her glass completely full.

“I want the prince, do you hear me? I want all of him, the sugar sweet prince!”

“Unfortunately he is not here,” said Dr. Petersen.

“Not here?” She laughed. “Not here? Then it must be someone else! You–or you–or even you old man–It doesn’t matter as long as it’s a man!”

She ripped her blouse off, removed her skirt, loosened her bodice and threw it crashing against the mirror.

“I want a man–I’ll take all three of you! Bring someone in from the street if you want.”

Her shift slid down and she stood naked in front of the mirror lifting up her breasts with both hands.

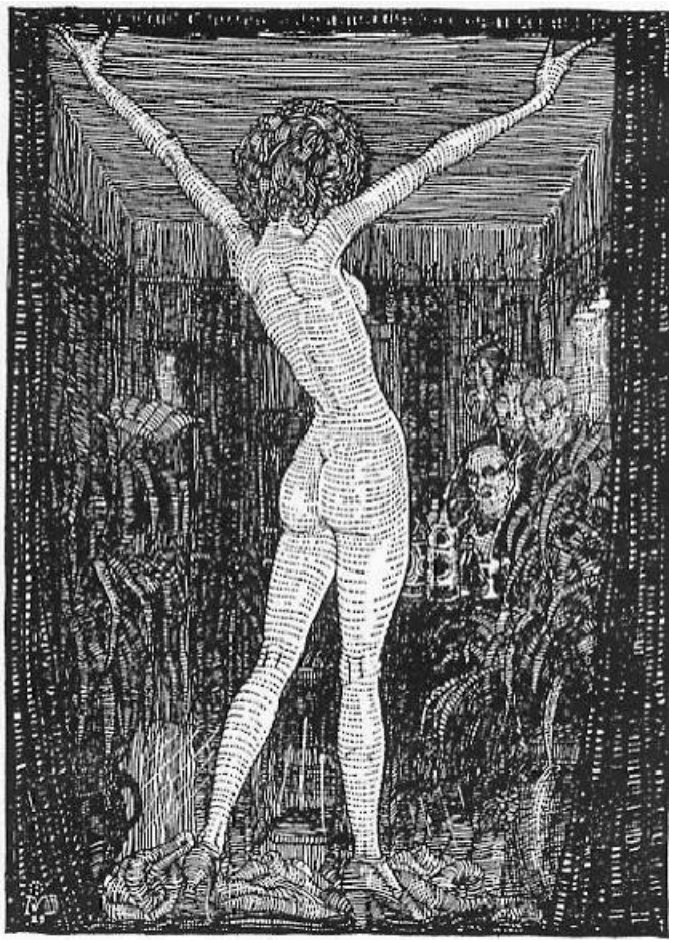
“Who wants me?” she cried loudly. “Let’s play–all together! It doesn’t cost anything today–because it’s a celebration to help the children and the soldiers.”

She spread her arms out wide reaching into the air. “Soldiers–” she screamed. “I want an entire regiment.”

“Shame on you,” said Dr. Petersen. “Is that any way for a prince’s bride to act?”

But his gaze lingered greedily on her firm breasts.

She laughed. “It doesn’t matter–prince or no prince! Anyone that wants me can have me! My children are whore’s children whether they be from beggar or from a prince.”



“ It doesn’t matter–prince or no prince! Anyone that wants me can have me!”

Her body became aroused and her breasts extended towards the men. Hot lust radiated from her white flesh, lascivious blood streamed through her blue veins–and her gaze, her quivering lips, her demanding arms, her inviting legs, her hips, and her breasts screamed out with wild desire, “Take me. Take me!”

She was not a prostitute any more–The last veils had been removed and she stood there free of all fetters, the pure female, the prototype, the ideal, from top to bottom.

“Oh, she is the one!” Frank Braun whispered. “Mother Earth–she is Mother Earth–”

A sudden trembling came over her as her skin shivered. Her feet dragged heavily as she staggered over to the sofa.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” she murmured. “Everything is spinning!”

“You’re just a little tipsy,” said the attorney quickly. “Drink this and then sleep it off.”

He put another full glass of cognac up to her mouth.

“Yes, I would like to sleep,” she stammered. “Will you sleep with me, youngster?”

She threw herself down onto the sofa, stretched out both legs into the air, laughed out lightly, then sobbed loudly and wept until she was still. Then she turned onto her side and closed her eyes.

Frank Braun pushed a pillow under her head and covered her up. He ordered coffee, went to the window and opened it wide but shut it again a moment later as the early morning light broke in. He turned around.

“Now gentlemen, are you satisfied with this object?”

Dr. Petersen looked at the prostitute with an admiring eye.

“I believe she will do very well,” he opinioned. “Look at her hips, your Excellency, it’s like she is predestined for an impeccable birth.”

The waiter came and brought coffee. Frank Braun commanded him, “Telephone the nearest ambulance. We need a stretcher brought in here for the lady. She has become very sick.”

The Privy Councilor looked at him in astonishment, “What was that all about?”

“That is called–” laughed his nephew. “hitting the nail on the head. It’s called that I am thinking for you and that I am more intelligent than you are. Do you really think that when the girl is sober again she would go one step with you? Even as long as I kept her drunk with words and with wine I still needed to come up with something new to keep her interest. She would run away from both of you heroes at the nearest street corner in spite of all the money and all the princes in the world!

That is why I had to take control. Dr. Petersen, when the ambulance comes you will take the girl immediately to the train station. If I’m not wrong the early train leaves at six o’clock, be on it. You will take an entire cabin and put your patient into bed there. I don’t think she will wake up, but if she does give her some more cognac. You might add a couple drops of morphine as well. That way you should be comfortably in Bonn by evening with your booty–Telegraph ahead so the Privy Councillor’s carriage is waiting for you at the train station. Put the girl inside and take her to your clinic–Once she is there it will not be so easy for her to escape–You have your ways of keeping her there I’m sure.”

“Forgive me, doctor.” The assistant doctor turned to him, This almost appears like a forcible kidnapping.”

“Yes it does,” nodded the attorney. “Salve your citizen’s conscience with the knowledge that you have a contract!–Now don’t talk about it, do it!–Do what you are told.”

Dr. Petersen turned to his chief, who was quiet and brooding in the middle of the room and asked whether he could take first class, which room at the clinic he should put the girl in, whether they needed a special assistant and–

During all this Frank Braun stepped up to the sleeping prostitute.

“Beautiful girl,” he murmured. “Your locks creep like fiery golden adders.”

He pulled a narrow golden ring from his finger, one with a little pearl on it. Then he took her hand and placed it on her finger.

“Take this, Emmy Steenhop gave me this ring when I magically poisoned her flowers. She was beautiful, strong, and like you, was a remarkable prostitute!–Sleep child, dream of your prince and your prince’s child!”

He bent over and kissed her lightly on the forehead–The ambulance orderlies came with a stretcher. They took the sleeping prostitute and carefully place her on the stretcher, covered her with a warm woolen blanket and carried her out. Like a corpse, thought Frank Braun. Dr. Petersen excused himself and went after them.

Now the two of them were alone.

A few minutes went by and neither of them spoke. Then the Privy Councilor spoke to his nephew.

“Thank you,” he said dryly.

“Don’t mention it,” replied his nephew. “I only did it because I wanted to have a little fun and variety. I would be lying if I said I did it for you.”

The Privy Councilor continued standing there right in front of him, twiddling his thumbs.

“I thought as much. By the way, I will share something that you might find interesting. As you were chatting about the prince’s child, it occurred to me that when this child is born into the world I should adopt it.”

He laughed, “You see, your story was not that far from the truth and this little alraune creature already has the power to take things from you even before it is conceived. I will name it as my heir. I’m only telling you this now so you won’t have any illusions about inheriting.”

Frank Braun felt the cut. He looked his uncle straight in the eye.

“That’s just as well Uncle Jakob,” he said quietly. “You would have disinherited me sooner or later anyway, wouldn’t you?

The Privy Councilor held his gaze and didn’t answer. Then the attorney continued.

“Now perhaps it would be best if we use this time to settle things with each other–I have often angered you and disgusted you–For that, you have disinherited me. We are quit.

But I gave you this idea and you have me to thank that it is now possible. For that you owe me a little gratitude. I have debts–”

The professor listened, a quick grin spread over his face.

“How much?” he asked.

Frank Braun answered, “–Now it depends–twenty thousand ought to cover it.”

He waited, but the Privy Councilor calmly let him wait.

“Well?” he asked impatiently.

Then the old man said, “Why do you say ‘well’? Do you seriously believe that I will pay your debts for you?”

Frank Braun stared at him. Hot blood shot through his temples, but he restrained himself.

“Uncle Jakob,” he said, and his voice shook. “I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t need to. One of my debts is urgent, very urgent. It is a gambling debt, on my honor.”

The professor shrugged his shoulders; “You shouldn’t have been gambling.”

“I know that,” answered his nephew, exerting all of his nerves to control himself. “Certainly, I shouldn’t have done it. But I did–and now I must pay. There is something else–I can’t go to mother with these things. You know as well as I do that she already does more for me than she

should–She just a while ago put all my affairs in order for me–Now, because of that she's sick–In short, I can't go to her and I won't."

The Privy Councilor laughed bittersweet, "I am very sorry for your poor mother but it will not make me change my mind."

"Uncle Jakob," he cried into the cold sneering mask, beside himself with emotion. "Uncle Jakob, you don't know what you are saying. I owe some fellow prisoners at the fortress a thousand and I must pay them back by the end of the week. I have a few other pathetic little debts to people that have loaned me money on my good face. I can't cheat them. I also pumped money out of the commander so that I could travel here–"

"Him too!" the professor interrupted.

"Yes, him too!" he replied. "I lied to him, told him that you were on your death bed and that I had to be near you in your final hours. That's why he gave me leave."

The Privy Councilor wagged his head back and forth, "You told him that?–You are a veritable genie at borrowing and swindling–But now that must finally come to an end."

"Blessed Virgin," screamed the nephew. "Be reasonable uncle Jakob! I must have the money–I am lost if you don't help me."

Then the Privy Councilor said, " The difference doesn't seem to be that much to me. You are lost anyway. You will never be a decent person."

Frank Braun grabbed his head with both hands. "You tell me this, uncle? You?"

"Certainly," declared the professor. "What do you throw your money away on?–It's always foolish things."

"That might well be, uncle," he threw back. "But I have never stuck money into foolish things the way you have!"

He screamed, and it seemed to him that he was swinging a riding whip right into the middle of the old man's ugly face. He felt the sting of his words–but also felt how quickly they cut through without resistance–like through foam, like through sticky slime–

Quietly, almost friendly, the Privy Councilor replied. "I see that that you are still very stupid my boy. Allow your old uncle to give you some good advice. Perhaps it will be useful sometime in your life.

When you want something from people you must go after their little weaknesses. Remember that. I needed you today. For that I tolerated all the insults you threw at me–But you see how it worked. Now I have what I wanted from you–Now it is different and you come pleading to me. You never once thought it would go any other way–Not when you were so useful to me. Oh no! But perhaps there is something else you can do. Then you might be thankful for this good advice."

Frank Braun said, "Uncle, I'm going down. Do it–For the first time in you life do it–what I ask of you–I know how it seems–and I will never go against you again. What do you want me to do?–Should I grovel even more before you?–Come, let this be enough–Give me the money."

Then the Privy Councilor spoke, "I will make you a proposition, nephew. Do you promise to listen quietly? To not bluster and roar again like you always do?"

He said firmly, "Yes, Uncle Jakob."

"Then listen–You shall have the money that you need to get you out of trouble. If you need more, we will have to talk a little about the amount later. But I need you–need you here at home. I will have it arranged for you to be placed there under house arrest for the duration of your sentence–"

"Why not?" Frank Braun answered. "It doesn't matter to me if I am here or there. How long will you need me?"

"Around a year, not quite that long," answered the professor.

“I agree,” said the attorney. “What do I need to do?”

“Oh not much,” replied the old man. “Just a little employment that you are already accustomed to and very good at!

You see, my boy,” the Privy Councilor continued. “I need a little help with this girl that you have arranged for me. You are entirely correct. She will run away from us, will become unspeakably bored during her pregnancy and certainly try to abort the child.

I want you to watch over her and protect our interests, prevent her from doing any of these things. Naturally it is a lot easier to do in a prison or workhouse where guards can continually watch. But unfortunately we are not equipped for that. I can’t lock her up in the terrarium with the frogs or in a cage like the monkeys or guinea pigs can I?”

“Certainly not, uncle.” the attorney said. “You must find some other way.”

The old man nodded, “I have found another way. We need someone that will keep her contented right where she is. Now it appears to me that Dr. Petersen is completely unsuitable to hold her interest for a long time. He could scarcely satisfy her for one night. But it needs to be a man. I was thinking about you–”

Frank Braun pressed the chair arms as if he would break them. He breathed deeply.

“Of me–” he repeated.

“Yes, of you,” the Privy Councilor continued. “It is one of the little things that I need you for. You can keep her from running away, tell her some new nonsense. Put your fantasies to some useful purpose and in the absence of her prince, she can fall in love with you. You will be able to satisfy her sensual and sexual requirements. If you are not enough for her, I’m sure you certainly have friends and acquaintances enough that would be glad to spend a few hours with such a beautiful creature.”

The attorney gasped, his voice rang hot. “Uncle,” he spoke. “Do you know what you are asking? You want me to be the lover of this prostitute while she is carrying the murderer’s child? I should entertain her and find new lovers for her every day? Be her pimp–”

“Certainly,” the professor interrupted him quietly. “I know very well what I’m doing. It appears to be the only thing in the world that you are very good at, my boy.”

He didn’t answer, felt this stroke, felt his cheeks become bright red, his temples glow hot. He felt the blows like long stripes from a riding whip cutting across his face and he understood quite well that his uncle was having his revenge.

The Privy Councilor knew it too, a satisfied grin spread across his drooping features.

“You can be grateful boy, “ he said slowly. “We don’t need to deceive each other, you and I. We can say things the way they really are. I will hire you as a pimp for this prostitute.”

Frank Braun felt as if he was lying on the floor helpless, completely unarmed, miserably naked and could not move while the old man stepped on him with his dirty feet and spit into his gaping wounds with his poisonous spittle–He could not find a word to speak. Somehow he staggered dizzily down the stairs and out into the street where he stood staring into the bright morning sun.

He scarcely knew that he left, felt like he had been mugged, dropped by a frightful blow to the head and left lying in the gutter. He scarcely knew who he was any more, wandering through the streets for what seemed like centuries until he stood in front of an advertisement pillar. He read the words on the poster but only saw the words without understanding them. Then he found himself at the train station, went to the counter and asked for a ticket.

“To where?” the attendant asked.

“To where?–Yes–to where?”

He was amazed to hear his own voice say, “Coblenz.”

He searched in all his pockets for money. “Third Class,” he cried.

He had enough for that. He climbed up the steps to the platform. That was when he first realized that he was without a hat–He sat down on a bench and waited.

Then he saw her carried in on a stretcher, saw Dr. Petersen come in behind her. He didn’t move from his place, it felt as if it had absolutely nothing at all to do with him. He saw the train arrive, watched how the doctor opened a cabin in First Class and how the bearers carefully placed their burden inside. Then in back, at the end of the train, he climbed inside.

He clenched his jawbone as hysterical laugher convulsed him. It is so appropriate–he thought. Third class– This is good enough for the menial–for the pimp. Then he forgot again as he sat on the hard bench pressed tightly into his corner and stared down at the floorboards.

The gloomy fog would not leave his head. He heard the names of the stations called one after another and it seemed to him as if they were like sparks flowing through a telegraph wire. At other times it seemed like an eternity between one station and another.

In Cologne he had to get out and change trains. He needed to wait for the one going to the Rhine. But it was no interruption; he scarcely noticed the difference, whether he was sitting on a hard bench there or in the train.

Then he was in Coblenz, climbed out and again wandered through the streets. Night was falling when it finally occurred to him that he needed to get back to the fortress. He went over the bridge, climbed up the rocks in the dark and followed the narrow footpath of the prisoners through the underbrush.

Suddenly he was up above, in the officer’s courtyard, then in his room sitting on his bed. Someone came down the hall and stepped into the room,

candle in hand. It was the strong marine medic, Dr. Klaverjahn.

“Well hello,” he cried in the doorway. “The Sergeant-major was right. Back so soon brother? Then come on down the hall. The cavalry captain has a game going.”

Frank Braun didn’t move, scarcely heard what the other was saying. The doctor grabbed his shoulder and shook it heartily.

“Don’t just sit there like a log. Come on!”

Frank Braun sprang up swinging something else high as well. It was the chair that he had grabbed.

He moved a step closer, “Get out.” he hissed, “Get out, you scoundrel!”

Dr. Klaverjahn looked at him standing there in front of him. He looked into the pale, distorted face, the intent threatening eyes. It awoke the medical professional that was still in him and he recognized the condition instantly.

“So that’s how it is,” he said quietly–“Please excuse me.”–

Then he left.

Frank Braun stood for awhile with the chair in his hand. A cold laugh hung on his lips but he was thinking of nothing, nothing at all. He heard a knock at the door, heard it like it was far off in the distance. When he looked up–the little ensign was standing in front of him.

“You are back again, what happened?” He asked and startled a bit when the other didn’t answer.

Then he ran out and came back with a glass and a bottle of Bordeaux.

“Drink, it will be good for you.”

Frank Braun drank. He felt how the wine made his pulse race, felt how his legs trembled, threatening to buckle underneath him. He let himself fall heavily onto the bed.

The ensign supported him.

“Drink,” he urged.

But Frank Braun waved him away. “No, no,” he whispered. “It will make me drunk.”

He laughed weakly, “I don’t think I’ve had anything to eat today–”

A noise rang out from down the hall, loud laughing and yelling.

“What’s going on?” he asked indifferently.

The ensign answered, “They are playing. Two new ones came in yesterday.”

Then he reached into his pocket, “By the way, this came for you this evening. It’s a money dispatch for a hundred Marks. Here.”

Frank Braun took the paper, but had to read it twice before he finally understood what it said. His uncle had sent him a hundred Marks and wrote along with it:

“Please consider this as an advance.”

He sprang up with a bound. The fog rose as a red mist in front of his eyes–Advance! Advance? Oh, for that job the old man wanted him for–for that!

The ensign held the money out to him, “Here’s the money.”

He took it and it burned the tips of his fingers and this pain that he felt as a physical pain almost did him in completely. He shut his eyes, letting the scorching fire in his fingers climb into his hands and up into his arms. He felt this final insult burn deeply down into his bones.

“Bring me–” he cried. “Bring me some wine!”

Then he drank and drank. It seemed to him that the dark wine extinguished the sizzling fire.

“What are they playing?” he asked, “Baccarat?”

“No,” said the ensign. “They are playing dice, Lucky Seven.”

Frank Braun took his arm, “Come on. Let’s go.”

They stepped into the casino.

“Here I am!” he cried. “One hundred Marks on the eight and he threw his money on the table. The cavalry captain shook the cup. It was a six–

Chapter Five

Informs about her father and how Death stood as Godfather when Alraune came to life.

DR . Karl Petersen brought the Privy Councilor a large beautifully bound book that he had prepared especially for this project. The old ten Brinken family crest showed on the upper left corner of the red leather volume. In the middle glowed the large golden letters ATB.

The first page had been left blank. The professor had reserved it to write some early history himself. The next page began with a paragraph in Dr. Petersen's hand. He wrote of the short and simple life history of the mother and of her character and demeanor.

He had asked the prostitute to tell her life story and then quickly wrote it down. Even her previous convictions were mentioned. Alma had been sentenced twice for vagrancy; five or six times due to violations of police regulations concerning her profession and once because of theft–Yet, she maintained that she was innocent of the theft–the gentleman had given her the diamond pin.

Further down in the second paragraph Dr. Petersen had written down things about the presumptive father, the unemployed miner, Peter Weinland Noerissen, who had been condemned by a court and jury and sentenced to death in the name of the King.

The public prosecutor had presented the facts in an amiable, charming fashion. It appeared that P. Noerissen had been predestined to such a fate from infancy. His mother had been a notorious drinker. His father, an occasional worker, had been previously convicted because of frequent crude misdemeanors. One of his brothers was even now serving ten years in prison on similar grounds.

Peter Weinland Noerissen had become apprenticed to a blacksmith after he finished school. This had played an important part in the proceedings because of the skill and strength that had been displayed in the murder. Many witnesses gave evidence of his displays of unusual strength. He had a history of pushing himself on females even when they said they were not interested.

He had been released from military service because of a congenital defect. He was missing two fingers on his left hand. He worked in several diverse factories before finally coming to the Phoenix mine in the Ruhr industrial district. He was not a member of any trade union, not the old socialist union, the Christian or the mysterious Elks.

He was fired from the mine when he pulled a knife on an overseer. This was a serious violation and he received his first sentence of a year in jail. He was released after his counsel for the defense argued during appeal that the conviction was only based upon the word of the overseer with no real evidence that it was attempted manslaughter.

After that he was on the road, had crossed over the Alps twice and fought his way from Naples to Amsterdam. While he did work occasionally, he spent most of his time as a vagabond or hobo and was further convicted of a few other petty crimes. It was enough for the public prosecutor to assume that in the course of seven or eight years he had become a hardened criminal with no conscience.

The crime that he was now condemned for was not that clear either. It was still not entirely certain if it had been a robbery gone wrong or an intentional sex murder. The defense tried to portray it as if the accused had only intended to rape the well dressed and well endowed nineteen year old daughter of the home owner, Anna Sibilla Trautwein, when he encountered her in the Ellinger Rhine meadow that fateful evening.

That when he tried to rape the strong and vigorous girl she started screaming and he pulled his knife only to threaten her into silence. It didn’t work and she fought back more vigorously and in the struggle was stabbed. He only finished her off out of the fear of discovery. It was then only

natural that he take her petty tip money and jewelry to help him make good his escape.

This account did not match the condition of the corpse itself. It was established that the terrible dismemberment of the victim's vitals was most skillfully done and the cut almost workman like. The public prosecutor ended with a plea that the appeal to the Imperial court be refused, that there was no need for further reprieve and that the execution take place early in the morning on the following day at six o'clock.

In conclusion the book stated that the delinquent did agree to Dr. Petersen's request on the condition that he be brought two bottles of whiskey that evening around eight o'clock.

The Privy Councilor finished reading and then gave the book back.

"The father is cheaper than the mother!" he laughed.

"You will attend the execution as well. Don't forget to bring the common salt solution and other things you will need. Hurry back as soon as possible. Every minute counts, especially in a situation like we have here. There will scarcely be enough time. I will expect you at the clinic early in the morning. Don't bother finding an attendant. The princess will assist us."

"Princess Wolkonski, Your Excellency?" Dr. Petersen asked.

"Certainly," nodded the professor. "I have my reasons for bringing her into this little operation–Besides, she is very interested in such things. By the way–how is our patient today?"

The assistant doctor said, "Ah, your Excellency. It is the same old story, always the same now for the two weeks that she has been here. She cries, screams and raves–In short, she wants out. Today she smashed a couple of wash basins to pieces."

"Have you seriously tried to talk with her again?" asked the professor.

“I tried, but she scarcely let me get a word out,” answered Dr. Petersen. “It is fortunate that tomorrow is finally almost here–How we can ever keep her here until the child comes into the world is a puzzle to me.”

“That won’t be your problem Petersen,” the Privy Councilor clapped him benevolently on the shoulder. “We will find a way–Just do your duty.”

The assistant doctor said, “Your Excellency can count on me for that.”

The early morning sun kissed the honeysuckle leaves in the arbor and clean gardens where the Privy Councilor’s white women’s clinic lay. It lightly fondled the many colored dahlias in their dew fresh beds and caressed the large deep blue clematis on the wall.

Many colored finches and large thrushes ran across the smooth path, scurried through the evenly mown lawn and quickly flew off as eight iron hoofs struck sparks as they lightly hit the cobblestones of the street.

The princess climbed out of the carriage and came with quick strides through the garden. Her cheeks glowed, her strong bosom breathed heavily as she climbed the high steps up to the house. The Privy Councilor came up and opened the door for her.

“Come in, I’ve just had some tea made for you.”

She said–in a panting and hurried voice–“I just came from–there. I saw it. It–it was fabulous–exciting.”

He led her into the room. “Where have you just come from, your Highness? From the– execution?”

“Yes,” she said. “Dr. Petersen will be here soon–I received a ticket–just last night. It was intense–very intense.”

The Privy Councilor offered her a chair. “May I pour for you?”

She nodded, “Please, your Excellency. Very kind of you! A pity that you missed it! He was a splendid fellow–tall–strong.”

“Who?” he asked. “The delinquent?”

She drank her tea, “Yes, certainly, him! The murderer! Muscular and strapping–a powerful chest–like a boxer. He wore some kind of blue sweater–it was open at the neck. No fat, only muscle and sinews. Like a bull.”

“Could your Highness see the execution clearly?” asked the Privy Councilor.

“Perfectly, your Excellency!” she cried. “I stood at the window in the hall. The guillotine was right in front of me. He swayed a bit as he stepped up. They had to support him.”

“Please, another piece of sugar, your Excellency.”

The Privy Councilor served her. “Did he say anything?”

“Yes,” said the princess. “Twice, but each time only one word. The first time as the attorney read the sentence. That’s when he cried out half-loud–but I can’t really repeat it–”

“But your Highness!” The Privy Councilor grinned and patted her lightly on the hand. “You certainly don’t need to get embarrassed in front of me.”

She laughed, “No, certainly not. Well then–but reach me another slice of lemon. Thank you. Put it right there in the cup! Well then–he said, no–I can’t say it.”

“Highness,” said the professor with mild reproof.

She said, “You must close your eyes first.”

The Privy Councilor thought, “Old monkey!” but he closed his eyes. “Now?” he asked.

She still hesitated, “I–I will say it in French–”

“That’s fine–in French then!” he cried impatiently.

Then she pressed her lips together, bent forward and whispered in his ear, “Merde!”

The professor bent backward, the princess’s strong perfume bothered him. “So that’s what he said?”

“Yes,” she nodded. And he said it as if he was indifferent to it all. I found it very attractive, almost gentleman like.”

“Certainly,” confirmed the Privy Councilor. “Only a pity that he didn’t say it in French as well. What was the other word he said?”

“Oh, that was bad,” the princess sipped her tea, nibbled at a cookie. It completely ruined the good impression he had made on me! Just think, your Excellency, just as the executioner’s assistants seized him, he suddenly began to scream and cry like a little child.”

“Well,” said the professor. “Another cup, your Highness?–And what did he scream?”

“First he defended himself,” she explained. “The best he could, silent and powerfully even though both hands were tightly tied behind his back. There were three assistants and they threw themselves on him while the executioner stood there watching quietly in his dress suit and white gloves. At first it pleased me, how the murderer threw off the three butchers, how they tore at him and pushed without bringing him one step closer. Oh, it was terribly exciting, your Excellency.”

“I can only imagine, your Highness,” he blurted out.

“But then,” she continued. “Then it all changed. One grabbed his leg while another pushed his bound arms high and he stumbled forward. At that moment he must have felt his resistance was useless, that he was lost. Perhaps–Perhaps he had been a little drunk–and was now suddenly very sobe –Pfui–That’s when he screamed.”

The Privy Councilor smiled, “What did he scream? Must I close my eyes again?”

“No,” she cried. “You can leave the open, your Excellency–He became a coward, a pathetic coward, full of fear. He screamed, ‘Mama!–Mama!–Mama!’ dozens of times while they had him on his knees, dragged him to the guillotine and pushed his head into the circular opening of the board.”

“Was he still crying for his mama at the last moment?” asked the Privy Councilor.

“No,” she answered. “Not at the very last. After the hard board was locked firmly around his neck with his head sticking out the other side he became very quiet. Something seemed to be going on inside of him.”

The professor became very attentive, “Could you see his face, your Highness? Could you guess at what was going on inside him?”

The princess said, “I could see him just as clearly as I see you right now sitting in front of me–What was going on inside him–I don’t really know–there was just an instant–After the executioner looked around one last time to see that everything was ready–when his hand pressed the button that released the blade. I saw the eyes of the murderer, they stood wide open, with insane passion, saw his mouth panting and his features contorted with desire–”

She stopped.

“Was that all?” inquired the Privy Councilor.

She finished, “Yes, then the guillotine fell and his head sprang into the sack that one of the assistants held open- Please, reach me the marmalade, your Excellency.”

There was a knock at the door. It opened and Dr. Petersen stepped inside. In his hand swung a long glass tube, tightly corked and wrapped in wadding.

Good morning, your Highness," he said. "Good morning, your Excellency–Here–here it is."

The princess sprang up, "Let me see–"

But the Privy Councilor held her back. "Slow down, your Highness. You will see it soon enough. If it is all right with you, we will get right to work."

He turned to the assistant doctor, "I don't know if it will be important, but just in case it would be a good idea if you–"

His voice sunk as he put his lips to the ear of the doctor.

He nodded, "Very well, your Excellency. I will give the orders immediately."

They went through the white corridors and stopped just in front of No. Seventeen.

"Here she is," said the Privy Councilor as he carefully opened the door.

The room was entirely white, radiant with sunlight. The girl lay deeply asleep in bed. A bright ray scurried in from the tightly barred windows, trembled on the floor, clambered up a golden ladder, darted across the sheets and nestled lovingly on her sweet cheek, plunging her red hair into glowing flames. Her lips were moving–half-open–as if she were lightly whispering words of love.

"She's dreaming of her prince," said the Privy Councilor.

Then he laid his cold, moist hand on her shoulder and shook it.

"Wake up Alma."

A slight shock flew through her limbs. She sat up, drunk with sleep.

"What do you want?" she stammered.

Then she recognized the professor. “Leave me alone.”

“Come on Alma, don’t be foolish,” the Privy Councilor admonished her. “It is finally time. Be sensible and don’t give us any trouble.”

With a quick jerk he pulled the sheets away throwing her onto the floor.

The eyes of the princess widened, “Very good! The girl is very well endowed–that is convenient.”

But the prostitute pulled her nightshirt down and covered herself as well as possible with a pillow.

“Go away!” She screamed. “I won’t do it!”

The Privy Councilor waved to the assistant doctor.

“Go,” he commanded. “Hurry, we don’t have any time to lose.”

Dr. Petersen quickly left the room. The princess came up and sat on the bed, talked to the girl.

“Don’t be silly, little one. It won’t do any good.”

She attempted to caress her, massaging her with fat be-ringed fingers over throat and neck, down to her breasts.

Alma pushed her away, “What do you want?–Who are you?–Go away, away–I won’t do it!”

The princess would not be rebuffed, “I only want what’s best for you child–I’ll give you a pretty ring and a new dress–”

“I don’t want a ring,” screamed the prostitute. “I don’t need a new dress. I want to go from here. Why won’t they leave me in peace?”

The creation of Alraune

The Privy Councilor opened the glass tube in smiling tranquility.

“Later you will be left in peace–and later you can go. Meanwhile you have an obligation to fulfill that you agreed to at the very beginning–Ah, there you are doctor.”

He turned to the assistant doctor who had just entered with a chloroform mask in his hand.

“Come here quickly.”

The prostitute stared at him with terrified, wide protruding eyes.

“No,” she lamented. “No! No!”

She made as if to spring out of the bed and pushed the assistant doctor so hard with both hands on his chest as he tried to restrain her that he staggered back and almost fell down. Then the princess threw herself onto the girl with wide stretched arms, pressing her back into the bed with her mighty weight. Her fingers with their many rings clawed into the luminous flesh as she gripped a long strand of red hair in her teeth.

The prostitute struggled, kicking her legs into the air, unable to free her arms or move her body under this mighty burden. She saw as the doctor placed the mask over her face, heard him lightly counting “one, two, three–”

She screamed and tried to turn her head to the side away from the mask, “No! No! I won’t! I won’t! Oh, I can’t breathe–”

Then her screams died away, turned into a pitiful weak whimper, “Mother–oh–mother.”

Twelve days later the prostitute Alma Raune was delivered to Criminal Court for imprisonment pending an investigation. The warrant was issued because she was accused of theft and without any home of record considered at risk to flee. The charges were brought by his Excellency Privy Councilor ten Brinken.

Already in the first days the professor had repeatedly asked the assistant doctor if he had not seen this or that thing that was missing. The Privy Councilor was missing an old signet ring that he had set to one side while washing and then left it. He was missing a little money purse that he had left in his overcoat as well as he could remember.

He asked Dr. Petersen to unobtrusively keep a sharp eye on all the employees. Then the assistant doctor’s gold watch disappeared from a room in the clinic where he kept it in a locked drawer in his writing desk. The drawer had been forcibly opened. A thorough search of the clinic and all the employees was immediately declared but nothing was found.

“It must be one of the patients,” the Privy Councilor concluded and ordered a search of all the rooms as well. This was led by Dr. Petersen, but again without success.

“Have you forgotten any rooms?” his chief questioned.

“None, your Excellency!” answered the assistant doctor. “Except Alma’s room.”

“Why haven’t you checked there?” asked the Privy Councilor again.

“But your Excellency!” Dr. Petersen replied. “That is completely out of the question. The girl is watched night and day. She has not once been out of her room and now since she knows that we have been successful has become completely out of hand. She howls and screams the entire day and threatens to drive us all crazy. She only thinks about how she can escape and other ways to frustrate our goal–To put it straight, your Excellency, it seems impossible to me for us to keep the girl here the entire time.”

“So,” the Privy Councilor laughed. “Petersen, go and search room seventeen at once. It does not appear to me that we can count on the innocence of the prostitute.”

A quarter of an hour later Dr. Petersen came back with a knotted handkerchief.

“Here are the missing items,” he said. “I found them in the bottom of the girl’s laundry sack.”

“I thought so!” nodded the Privy Councilor. “Now go and telephone the police right away.”

The assistant doctor hesitated, “Excuse me, your Excellency, if I may be permitted to object. The girl is certainly not guilty even if the evidence seems to speak against her. Your Excellency should have seen her as I searched the room with the old nurse and finally found the things. She was completely apathetic, wasn’t concerned at all. She certainly didn’t have

anything to do with the theft. One of the staff must have taken the items and when threatened by discovery, hid them in her room."

The professor grinned, "You are very chivalrous Petersen–But all the same–telephone the police!"

"Your Excellency," the assistant doctor pleaded. "Can't we wait a little. Perhaps we can question the staff one more time–"

Listen Petersen," said the Privy Councilor. "You should think this through a little more. It doesn't matter at all if the prostitute has stolen these things. The important thing is that we will be rid of her and she will be safe until her hour is come. Isn't that true? In prison she will be kept safe for us, much safer than here. You know how well we are paying her and I am willing to pay her even more for this little inconvenience–after it is all over.

It won't be any worse for her in prison than here–Her room will be a little smaller, her bed a little harder and the food won't be as good. But she will have companions–and that will be worth a lot in her condition."

Dr. Petersen looked at him, still not entirely convinced. "Quite true, your Excellency, but–won't she talk there? It could be very uncomfortable if–"

The Privy Councilor smiled, "How so? Let her talk, as much as she wants. Hysteria- mendax–you know that she is hysterical and that hysterical people are known to lie! No one will believe her, especially since she's a hysterical pregnant woman. What would she say anyway? The story of the prince, that my nephew swindled her with so neatly?

Do you believe that the judge, the attorney, the prison director, the pastor or any other reasonable person would even listen to such obstruse nonsense?–Besides, I will speak to the prison doctor myself–who is he anyway?"

"My colleague, Dr. Perscheidt," said the assistant doctor.

“Ah, your friend, little Perscheidt,” the professor confirmed. “I know him as well. I will ask him to keep an especially watchful eye on our patient. I will tell him that she had an affair with an acquaintance of mine that sent her to my clinic and that this gentleman is prepared to take full care of the child in every way. I will also tell him about the extraordinary lies I have observed in the patient and even what stories she is likely to tell him.

Even more, we will retain Legal Councilor Gontram for her defense at our own cost and explain the case to him so that he will not believe anything she says either– Are you still afraid Petersen?”

The assistant doctor looked at his chief in admiration.

“No, your Excellency,” he said. “Your Excellency has thought of everything. Whatever is in my power to do, I am at your service, Excellency.”

The Privy Councilor sighed loudly, then reached out his hand.

“Thank you dear Petersen. You will not believe how difficult these little lies have been for me. But what is a person to do? Science has always demanded such sacrifices. Our brave predecessors, the doctors of the late Middle Ages, were forced to steal bodies from cemeteries so they could learn anatomy. They risked being criminally charged with violation of a corpse and similar nonsense. We can’t complain, must take such little deceptions into the bargain, for the sake of our sacred science.

Now go Petersen. Telephone the police!”

The assistant doctor left. In his heart was a great and honest admiration for his chief.

Alma Raune was sentenced for burglary. Her stubborn denial and prior conviction worked against her. Despite that, she was given a light sentence. Apparently because she was really very beautiful and also because Legal Councilor Gontram was defending her. She only received one year and six

months imprisonment and the time she had already served applied to it as well.

This was further reduced at the request of his Excellency ten Brinken even though her conduct while in prison could in no way be considered model behavior. In his gracious request for a pardon he concluded that her bad behavior was due to her morbidly hysterical condition and also stressed that she would soon become a mother.

In the early morning at the first signs of labor she was released and taken to the ten Brinken clinic. There she was placed in her old white room, No. Seventeen, at the end of the corridor. The labor pains had already begun during transport and Dr. Petersen tried to calm her by saying it would soon be over. But he was wrong.

The labor lasted that entire day, that night and the following day. They let up for a little while and then returned even more strongly. The girl screamed and whimpered, writhing in pain and misery.

The third short paragraph in the leather bound book A. T. B. is in the hand of the assistant doctor and deals with this remarkable birth. He performed, with the assistance of the prison doctor, the very difficult delivery that lasted for three days and ended with the death of the mother. The Privy Councilor himself was not present.

In this account Dr. Petersen stressed the strong constitution and the excellent build of the mother, which should have allowed a very easy delivery. Only the exceptionally rare presentation of the baby caused the complications to take place that in the end made it impossible to save both mother and child.

It was further mentioned that the child, a girl, while being pulled out of the mother’s body began an extraordinary shrieking that was so shrill and penetrating that neither gentlemen nor the midwife had ever experienced anything like it before in other births. The screams sounded almost as if the child were experiencing unbelievable pain at being so violently separated from the mother’s womb.

The screams became so penetrating and dreadful that they could scarcely bear the horror of it. His colleague, Dr. Perscheidt, broke into a cold sweat and had to sit down. After the birth the infant immediately became quiet and didn't even whimper.

The midwife while bathing the delicate and thin child immediately noticed an unusually developed atresia Vaginalis where the legs halfway down to the knees had grown together. After further investigation it was found to be only the external skin that was binding the legs together and could be corrected later through a quick operation.

As for the mother, she had certainly endured heavy pain and suffering without any chloroform, local anesthesia–or even as much as a Scopolamine-morphine injection. She was hemorrhaging so badly they could not risk further stress to her heart. She screamed the entire time for all those long hours and only during the moment of birth itself did the dreadful shrieks of the infant drown out the screams of the mother.

Her moans became weaker, some two and a half-hours later she lost consciousness and died. The direct cause of death was a torn uterus and the resulting hemorrhage.

The body of the prostitute, Alma Raune, was assigned for dissection since her relatives in Halberstadt raised no claims and refused to pay the cost of burial when they were notified. The Anatomy professor Holzberger used it in his lectures and assigned parts of it to each of his students to study. These certainly contributed vastly to their education except for the head, which had been given to senior medical student Fassman of the Hansea fraternity. He was supposed to prepare it as a finished skull but forgot it over vacation. He decided that he already had enough skulls and no longer needed to clean it. Instead he fashioned a beautiful dice cup out of the top of the skull. He already had five dice that had been made from the vertebrae of the executed murderer Noerrissen and now they needed a suitable dice cup.

Senior medical student Fassman was not superstitious, but he maintained that his dice cup served him extremely well when playing for his morning half-pint. He sang such high praise for his skull dice cup and

bone dice that they gradually acquired a certain reputation. First with his own friends, then within his fraternity and finally over the entire student body.

Senior medical student Fassman loved his dice cup and almost saw it as blackmail when his Excellency Privy Councilor ten Brinken asked him to give up his famous dice cup and dice at the time of his exam. It so happened that he was very weak in gynecology and the professor had a reputation for giving very strict and difficult exams. The result was that he passed his exam with flying colors. For as long as he owned it, the dice cup brought him good luck.

There is one other curious thing that remains in the story of these two people that without ever seeing each other became Alraune's father and mother, how they were brought together in a strange manner even after their death. The Anatomy Building janitor, Knoblauch, threw out the remaining bones and tatters of flesh into a common shallow grave in the gardens of the Anatomy Building. It was behind the wall where the white roses climb and grow so abundantly–

Intermezzo

All sins, my dear girl, are brought here by the hot south wind from out of the desert. Where the sun burns through endless centuries there hovers over the sleeping sands a thin white haze that forms itself into soft white clouds that float around until the desert whirlwinds roll them and form them into strange round eggs that contain the sun's blazing heat.

There the basilisk slinks around through the pale night. In a strange manner the moon, the eternally infertile moon, fathered it. Yet its mother, the desert sand, is just as infertile as the other is. It is the secret of the desert. Many say it is an animal but that is not true. It is a thought that has grown where there is no soil or no seed. It sprang out of the eternally infertile and took on a chaotic form that life can not recognize. That is why no one can describe this creature. It is fashioned out of nothingness itself.

But what the people say is true. It is very poisonous. When it eats the blazing eggs of the sun that the whirlwinds create in the desert sands purple flames shoot out of its eyes and its breath becomes hot and heavy with horrible fumes.

But the basilisk, pale child of the moon, does not eat all of the vapory eggs. When it is sated and completely filled with hot poison it spits green saliva over the eggs still lying there in the sand and scratches them with sharp claws so the vile slime can penetrate through their soft skin.

As the early morning winds arise a strange heaving like moist violet and green colored lungfish can be seen growing under the thin shells.

Throughout the land at noon eggs burst as the blazing sun hatches crocodile eggs, toad eggs, snake eggs and eggs of all the repulsive lizards and amphibians. These poisonous eggs of the desert also burst with a soft pop. There is no seed inside, no lizard or snake, only a strange vapory shape that contains all colors like the veil of the dancer in the flame dance. It contains all odors like the pale sanga flowers of Lahore, contains all sounds like the musical heart of the angel Israfael and it contains all poisons as well like the basilisk's own loathsome body.

Then the south wind of mid-day blows in, creeping out of the swamps of the hot jungles and dances over the desert sands. It takes up the fiery creatures of the sun's eggs and carries them far across the blue ocean. They move with the south wind like soft vapory clouds, like the loose filmy night garments of a priestess.

That is how all delightful, poisonous plagues fly to our fair north–

Our quiet days are cool, sister, like the northland. Your eyes are blue and know nothing of hot desire. The hours of your days are like the heavy blue clusters of wisteria dropping down to form a soft carpet. My feet stride lightly through them in the glinting sunlight of your arbor.

But when the shadows fall, fair sister, there creeps a burning over your youthful skin as the haze flies in from the south. Your soul breathes it in eagerly and your lips offer all the red-hot poisons of the desert in your bloody kisses–

Then it may not be to you that I turn, fair sister, sleeping child of my dreamy days–When the mist lightly ripples the blue waves, when the sweet voices of the birds sing out from the tops of my oleander, then I may turn to the pages in the heavy leather bound volume of Herr Jakob ten Brinken.

Like the sea, my blood flows slowly through my veins as I read the story of Alraune through your quiet eyes in unending tranquility. I present her like I find her, plain, simple, like one that is free of all passions–

But then I drink the blood that flows out of your wounds in the night and it mixes with my own red blood, your blood that has been poisoned by the sinful poisons of the hot desert. That is when my brain fevers from your kisses so that I ache and am tormented by your desires–

Then it might well be that I tear myself loose from your arms, wild sister– it might be that I sit there heavily dreaming at my window that looks out over the ocean while the hot southerly wind throws its fire. It might be that I again take up the leather bound volume of the Privy Councilor, that I might once more read Alraune's story–through your poison hot eyes. Then

the ocean screams through the immovable rocks– just like the blood screams through my veins.

What I read then is different, entirely different, has different meaning and I present her again like I find her, wild, hot–like someone that is full of all passions!

Chapter Six

Deals with how the child Alraune grew up.

THE acquisition of the dice cup is mentioned by the Privy Councilor in the leather bound book. From that point on it was no longer written in the distinct and clear hand of Dr. Petersen but in his own thin, hesitating and barely legible script.

But there are several other short entries in the book that are of interest to this story. The first refers to the operation taken to correct the child's Atresia Vaginalis performed by Dr. Petersen and the cause of his untimely demise.

The Privy Councilor mentions that in consideration of the savings he had made through the death of the mother and the good help of his assistant doctor through the entire affair he granted a three month summer trip vacation with all expenses paid and promised a special bonus of a thousand Marks as well. Dr. Petersen was extremely overjoyed about this trip. It was the first big vacation he had ever taken in his life. But he insisted upon performing the simple operation beforehand even though it could have easily been put off for a much longer time without any special concern.

He performed the operation a couple days before his scheduled departure with excellent results for the child. Unfortunately he, himself, developed a severe case of blood poisoning–What was so astonishing was that despite his almost exaggerated daily care for cleanliness–it was scarcely forty-eight hours later that he died after very intense suffering.

The direct cause of the blood poisoning could not be determined with certainty. There was a small wound on his left upper arm that was barely

perceptible with the naked eye. A light scratch from his little patient might have inflicted it.

The professor remarked how already twice in this matter he had been spared a great sum of money but did not elaborate any further.

It was then reported how the baby was kept for the time being in the clinic under the care of the head nurse. She was an unusually quiet and sensitive child that cried only once and that was at the time of her holy baptism performed in the cathedral by Chaplain Ignaz Schröder.

Indeed, she howled so fearfully that the entire little congregation–the nurse that carried her, Princess Wolkonski and Legal Councilor Sebastian Gontram as the godparents, the Priest, the sexton and the Privy Councilor himself–couldn't even begin to do anything with her. She began crying from the moment she left the clinic and did not stop until she was brought back home again from the church.

In the cathedral her screams became so unbearable that his Reverend took every opportunity to rush through the sacred ceremony so he and those present could escape from the ghastly music. Everyone gave a sigh of relief when it was all over and the nurse had climbed into the carriage with the child.

It appears that nothing significant happened during the first year in the life of this little girl whom the professor named "Alraune" out of an understandable whim. At least nothing noteworthy was written in the leather bound volume.

It was mentioned that the professor remained true to his word and even before the child was born had taken measures to adopt the girl and composed a certified will making her his sole heir to the complete exclusion of all his other relatives.

It was also mentioned that the princess, as godmother, gave the child an extraordinarily expensive and equally tasteless necklace composed of gold chain and two strands of beautiful pearls set with diamonds. At the center surrounded by more pearls was a hank of fiery red hair that the

Princess had cut from the head of the unconscious mother at the time of her conception.

The child stayed in the clinic for over four years up until the time the Privy Councilor gave up the Institute as well as the attached experimental laboratories that he had been neglecting more and more. Then he took her to his estate in Lendenich.

There the child got a playmate that was really almost four years older than she was. It was Wölfchen Gontram, the youngest son of the Legal Councilor. Privy Councilor ten Brinken relates very little of the collapse of the Gontram household. In short sentences he describes how death finally grew tired of the game he was playing in the white house on the Rhine and in one year wiped away the mother and three of her sons.

The fourth boy, Joseph, at the wish of his mother had been taken by Reverend Chaplain Schröder to become a priest. Frieda, the daughter, lived with her friend, Olga Wolkonski, who in the meantime had married a somewhat dubious Spanish Count and moved to his house in Rome. Following these events was the financial collapse of the Legal Councilor despite the splendid fee he had been paid for winning the divorce settlement for the princess.

The Privy Councilor puts down that he took the boy in as an act of charity–but doesn’t forget to mention in the book that Wölfchen inherited some vineyards with small farm houses from an aunt on his mother’s side so his future was secure. He remarks as well that he didn’t want the boy to feel he had been taken into a strangers house and brought up out of charity and compassion so he used the income from the vineyards to defray the upkeep of his young foster-child. It is to be understood that the Privy Councilor did not come up short on this arrangement.

Taking all of the entries that the Privy Councilor ten Brinken made in the leather bound volume during this time one could conclude that Wölfchen Gontram certainly earned the bread and butter that he ate in Lendenich. He was a good playmate for his foster-sister, was more than that, was her only toy and her nursemaid as well.

The love he shared with his wild brothers for living and frantically running around transferred in an instant to the delicate little creature that ran around alone in the wide garden, in the stables, in the green houses and all the out buildings. The great deaths in his parent's house, the sudden collapse of his entire world made a strong impression on him–in spite of the Gontram indolence.

The small handsome lad with his mother's large black dreamy eyes became quiet and withdrawn. Thousands of boyish thoughts that had been so suddenly extinguished now snaked out like weak tendrils and wrapped themselves solidly like roots around the little creature, Alraune. Whatever he carried in his young breast he gave to his new little sister, gave it with the great unbounded generosity that he had inherited from his sunny good-natured parents.

He went to school in the city where he always sat in the last row. At noon when he came back home he ran straight past the kitchen even though he was hungry. He searched around in the garden until he found Alraune. The servants often had to drag him away by force to give him his meals.

No one troubled themselves much over the two children but while they always had a strange mistrust of the little girl, they took a liking to Wölfchen. In their own way they bestowed on him the somewhat coarse love of the servants that had once been given to Frank Braun, the Master's nephew, so many years before when he had spent his school vacations there as a boy.

Just like him, the old coachman, Froitsheim, now tolerated Wölfchen around the horses, lifted him up onto them, let him sit on a wool saddle blanket and ride around the courtyard and through the gardens. The gardener showed him the best fruit in the orchards; cut him the most flexible switches and the maids kept his food warm, making sure that he never went without.

They thought of him as an equal but the girl, little as she was, had a way of creating a broad chasm between them. She never chatted with any of them and when she did speak it was to express some wish that almost sounded like a command. That was exactly what these people from the

Rhine in their deepest souls could not bear–not from the Master–and now most certainly not from this strange child.

They never struck her. The Privy Councilor had strongly forbidden that, but in every other way they acted as if the child was not even there. She ran around–fine–they let her run, cared for her food, her little bed, her underwear and her clothes–but just like they cared for the old biting watchdog, brought it food, cleaned its doghouse and unchained it for the night.

The Privy Councilor in no way troubled himself over the children and let them completely go their own way. Since the time he had closed the clinic he had also given up his professorship, keeping occupied with various real estate and mortgage affairs and even more with his old love, archeology.

He managed things as a clever and intelligent merchant so that museums around the world paid high prices for his skillfully arranged collections. The grounds all around the Brinken estate from the Rhine to the city on one side, extending out to the Eifel promontory on the other were filled with things that first the Romans and then all their followers had brought with them.

The Brinkens had been collectors for a long time and for ten miles in all directions any time a farmer struck something with his plowshare they would carefully dig up the treasure and take it to the old house in Lendenich that was consecrated to John of Nepomuck.

The professor took everything, entire pots of coins, rusted weapons, yellowed bones, urns, buckles and tear vials. He paid pennies, ten at the most. But the farmer was always certain to get a good schnapps in the kitchen and if needed money for sowing, at a high interest of course–but without the security demanded by the banks.

One thing was certain. The earth never spewed forth more than in those years when Alraune lived in the house.

The professor laughed and said, “She brings money into the house.”

He knew very well that these things happened in a natural way, that it was only the result of his intense occupation with these things of the earth. But still there was some connection with the little creature and he played with the thought.

He took a very risky speculation and bought enormous properties along the broad path of Villen Street. He had the earth dug up and every handful of dirt searched. He did business taking great calculated risks, putting a mortgage bank back on a sound financial basis when everyone else thought it would go bankrupt in a very short time. The bank held together. Whatever he touched went the right way.

Then through a coincidence he found a mineral water spring on one of his properties in the mountains. He had it barreled and hauled away. That is how he came into the mineral water line buying up whatever was available in the Rhineland until he almost had a monopoly in that industry. He formed a little company, hung a nationalistic cloak around it, declaring that a person had to make a stand against the foreigners, the English that owned Apollonaris.

The little owners flocked around this new leader, swore by “His Excellency”, and when he formed a joint company gladly allowed him to reserve the controlling shares for himself. It was a good thing they did, the Privy Councilor doubled their dividends and dealt sharply with the outsiders that had not wanted to go along.

He pursued a multitude of things one right after the other–they had only one thing in common–they all had something to do with the earth. It was just a whim of his, this thought that Alraune drew gold out of the earth and so he stayed with those things that had something to do with the earth. He didn’t really believe it for a second, but he still entered into even the wildest speculation with the certain confidence that it would succeed as long as it dealt with the earth.

He refused to deal with anything else without even looking into it, even highly profitable stock market opportunities that appeared with scarcely the slightest risk. Instead he bought huge quantities of extremely

rotten mining concerns, buying into ore as well as coal, then trading them in a series of shady deals. He always came out–

“Alraune does it,” he said laughing.

Then the day came when this thought became more than a joke to him. Wölfchen was digging in the garden, behind the stables under the large mulberry tree. That was where Alraune wanted to have her subterranean palace. He dug day after day and once in awhile one of the gardener’s boys would help.

The child sat close by; she didn’t speak, didn’t laugh, just sat there quietly and watched. Then one evening the boy’s shovel gave a loud clang. The gardener’s boy helped and they carefully dug the brown earth out from between the roots with their bare hands. They brought the professor a sword belt, a buckle and a handful of coins. Then he had the place thoroughly dug up and found a small treasure – genuine Gaelic pieces, rare and valuable. It was not really supernatural. Farmers all around sooner or later found something, why shouldn’t there be something hidden in his garden as well?

But that was the point. He asked the boy why he had dug in that particular spot under the mulberry tree and Wölfchen said the little one wanted him to dig there and nowhere else. Then he asked Alraune but she remained silent.

The Privy Councilor thought she was a divining rod, that she could feel where the earth held its treasure. He laughed about it. Yes, he still laughed. Sometimes he took her along out to the Rhine along Villen Street and over to the ground where his men were digging.

Then he would ask dryly enough,” Where should they dig?”

He observed her carefully as she went over the field to see if her sensitive body would give some sign, some indication, anything that might suggest–

But she remained quiet and her little body said nothing. Later when she understood what he wanted she would remain standing on one spot and

say, “Dig.”

They would dig and find nothing. Then she would laugh lightly. The professor thought, “She’s making fools of us.” But he always dug again where she commanded. Once or twice they found something, a Roman grave, then a large urn filled with ancient silver coins.

Now the Privy Councilor said, “It is coincidence.”

But he thought, “It could also be coincidence.”

One afternoon as the Privy Councilor stepped out of the library he saw the boy standing under the pump. He was half-naked with his body bent forward. The old coachman pumped, letting the cold stream pour over his head and neck, over his back and both arms. His skin was blazing red and covered with small blisters.

“What did you do Wölfchen?” He asked.

The boy remained quiet, biting his teeth together, but his dark eyes were full of tears.

The coachman said, “It’s stinging nettles. The little girl beat him with stinging nettles.”

Then the boy defended himself, “No, no. She didn’t beat me. I did it myself. I threw myself into them.”

The Privy Councilor questioned him carefully yet only with the help of the coachman was he able to get the truth out of the boy. It went like this:

He had undressed himself down to his hips, thrown himself into the nettles and rolled around in them. But–at the wish of his little sister. She had noticed how his hand burned when he accidentally touched the weed, had seen how it became red and blistered. Then she had persuaded him to touch them with his other hand and finally to roll around in them with his naked breast.

“Crazy fool!” The Privy Councilor scolded him. Then he asked if Alraune had also touched the stinging nettles.

“Yes,” answered the boy, but she didn’t get burned.

The professor went out into the garden, searched and finally found his foster-child. She was in the back by a huge wall tearing up huge bunches of stinging nettles. She carried them in her naked arms across the way to the wisteria arbor where she laid them out on the ground. She was making a bed.

“Who is that for?” he asked.

The little girl looked at him and said earnestly, “For Wölfchen!”

He took her hands, examined her thin arms. There was not the slightest sign of any rash.

“Come with me,” he said.

He led her into a greenhouse where Japanese primroses grew in long rows.

“Pick some flowers,” he cried.

Alraune picked one flower after another. She had to stretch high to reach them and her arms were in constant contact with the poisonous leaves. But there was no sign of a burning rash.

“She must be immune,” murmured the professor and wrote a concise thesis in the brown leather volume about the appearance of skin rashes through contact with stinging nettles and poison primrose. He proposed that the reaction was purely a chemical one. That the little hairs on the stems and leaves wounded the skin by secreting an acid, which set up a local reaction at the place of contact.

He attempted to discover a connection as to whether and to what extent the scarcely found immunity against these primroses and stinging nettles had to do with the known insensibility of witches and those

possessed. He also wanted to know whether the cause of both phenomenon and this immunity could be explained on an auto-suggestive or hysterical basis.

Now that he had once seen something strange in the little girl he searched methodically for things that would validate this thought. It was mentioned at this spot as an addendum that Dr. Petersen thought it was completely trivial and disregarded the fact in his report that the actual birth of the child took place at the midnight hour.

“Alraune, was thus brought into this life in the time honored manner,” concluded the Privy Councilor.

Old Brambach had come down from the hills; it had taken four hours to come from beyond the hamlet of Filip. He was a semi-invalid that went through the hamlets in the hill country selling church raffle tickets, pictures of saints and cheap rosaries. He limped into the courtyard and informed the Privy Councilor that he had brought some Roman artifacts with him that a farmer had found in his field.

The professor had the servants tell him that he was busy and to wait. So old Brambach waited there sitting on a stone bench in the yard smoking his pipe. After two hours the Privy Councilor had him called in. He always had people wait even when he had nothing else to do. Nothing lowered the price like letting people wait, he always said.

But this time he really had been busy. The director of the Germanic museum in Nuremburg was there and was purchasing items for a beautiful exhibit called “Gaelic finds in the Rhineland”.

The Privy Councilor did not let Brambach into the library but met with him in the little front room instead.

“Now, you old crippled rascal, let’s see what you have!” he cried.

The invalid untied a large red handkerchief and carefully laid out the contents on a fragile cane chair. There were many coins, a couple of helmet

shards, a shield pommel and an exquisite tear vial. The Privy Councilor scarcely turned to give a quick squinting glance at the tear vial.

“Is this all, Brambach?” he asked reproachfully and when the old man nodded he began to heartily upbraid him. He was so old now and still as stupid as a snotty nosed youngster! It had taken him four hours to get here and would take him four hours to go back. Then he had to wait a couple hours as well. He had frittered the entire day away on that trash there! The rubbish wasn’t worth anything. He could pack it back up and take it with him. He wouldn’t give a penny for the lot!

How often did he have to tell people again and again, “Don’t run to Lendenich with every bit of trash?”

It was stupid! It was better to wait until they had a nice collection and then bring everything in at one time! Or maybe he enjoyed the walk in the hot sun all the way here and back from Filip? He should be ashamed of himself.

The invalid scratched behind his ear and then turned his brown cap in his fingers very ill at ease. He wanted to say something to the professor. Most of the time he was very good at haggling a higher price for his wares. But he couldn’t think of a single thing, only the four miles that he had just come–exactly what the professor was now berating him for. He was completely contrite and comprehended thoroughly just how stupid he had been so he made no response at all. He requested only that he be allowed to leave the artifacts there so he wouldn’t have to haul them back. The Privy Councilor nodded and then gave him half a Mark.

“There Brambach, for the road! But next time be a little smarter and do what I said. Now go into the kitchen and have some butter-bread and a glass of beer!”

The invalid thanked him, happy enough that things had gone so well and he hobbled back across the court toward the kitchen. His Excellency snatched up the sweet tear vial, pulled a silk handkerchief out of his pocket and carefully cleaned it, viewing the fine violet glass from all sides. Then he opened the door and stepped back into the library where the curator from

Nuremburg stood before a glass case. He walked up brandishing the vial in his upraised arm.

“Look at this, dear doctor,” he began. “I have here a most unusual treasure! It belongs to the grave of Tullia, the sister of general Aulus. It is from the site at Schware-Rheindorf. I’ve already shown you several artifacts from there!”

He handed him the vial and continued.

“Can you tell me its point of origin?”

The scholar took the glass, stepped to the window and adjusted his glasses. He asked for a loupe and a silk cloth. He wiped it and held the glass against the light turning it this way and that. Somewhat hesitatingly and not entirely certain he finally said, “Hmm, it appears to be of Syrian make, probably from the glass factory at Palmyra.”

“Bravo!” cried the Privy Councilor. I must certainly watch myself around you. You are an expert!”

If the curator would have said it was from Agrigent or Munda he would have responded with equal enthusiasm.

“Now doctor, what time period is it from?”

The curator raised the vial one more time. “Second century,” he said. “First half.”

This time his voice rang with confidence.

“I give you my compliments,” confirmed the Privy Councilor. “I didn’t believe anyone could make such a quick and accurate determination!”

“Except yourself naturally, your Excellency,” replied the scholar flatteringly.

But the professor replied modestly, “You over estimate my knowledge considerably Herr doctor. I have spent no less than eight days of hard work

trying to make a determination with complete certainty. I have gone through a lot of books.

But I have no regrets. It is a rare and beautiful piece–has cost me enough too. The fellow that found it made a small fortune with it."

"I would really like to have it for my museum," declared the director. "What do you want for it?"

"For Nuremburg, only five thousand Marks," answered the professor. "You know that I offer all German museums specially reduced prices. Next week two gentlemen are coming here from London. I will offer them eight thousand and will certainly get it!"

"But your Excellency," responded the scholar. "Five thousand Marks! You know very well that I can't pay such a price! That is beyond my authorization."

The Privy Councilor said, "I'm really very sorry, but I can't give the vial away for any less."

The Herr from Nuremburg weighed the little glass in his hand. "It is a charming tear vial and I am inordinately fond of it. I will give you three thousand, your Excellency"

The Privy Councilor said, "No, nothing less than five thousand! But I tell you what Herr Director. Since that tear vial pleases you so much, permit me to give it to you as a personal gift. Keep it as a memento of your accurate determination."

"I thank you, your Excellency. I thank you!" cried the curator. He stood up and shook the Councilor's hand very hard. "But I am not permitted to accept any gifts in my position. Forgive me then if I must refuse. Anyway, I have decided to pay your price. We must keep this piece in the Fatherland and not permit it to go to England."

He went to the writing desk and wrote out his check. But before he left the Privy Councilor talked him into buying the other less interesting pieces–

from the grave of Tullia, the sister of general Aulus.

The professor ordered the horses ready for his guest and escorted him out to his carriage. As he came back across the court he saw Wölfchen and Alraune standing by the peddler who was showing them his colored images of the Saints. After a meal and some drink old Brambach had recovered some of his courage, had even sold the cook a rosary that he claimed had been blessed by the Bishop. That was why it cost thirty pennies more than the others did. That had all loosened his tongue, which just an hour before had been so timid. He steeled his heart and limped up to the Privy Councilor.

“Herr Professor,” he pleaded. “Buy the children a pretty picture of St. Joseph!”

His Excellency was in a good mood so he replied, “St. Joseph? No, but do you have one of St. John of Nepomuk?”

No, Brambach didn’t have one of him. He had one of St. Anthony though, St. John, St. Thomas and St. Jakob. But unfortunately none of Nepomuk and once again he had to be upbraided for not knowing his business. In Lendenich you could only sell St. John of Nepomuk, none of the other saints.

The peddler took it hard but made one last attempt. “A raffle ticket, Herr Professor! Take a raffle ticket for the restoration of St. Lawrence’s church in Dülmen. It only costs one Mark and every buyer receives an indulgence of one hundred days. It says so right here!”

He held the ticket under the Privy Councilor’s nose.

“No,” said the professor. We don’t need any indulgences. We are protestant, that’s how we get to heaven and a person can’t win anything in a raffle anyway.”

“What?” the peddler replied. “You can’t win? There are over three hundred prizes and the first prize is fifty thousand Marks in cash! It says so right here!”

He pointed with a dirty finger to the raffle ticket. The professor took the ticket out of his hand and examined it.

“You old ass!” he laughed. “And here it says there are five hundred thousand tickets! Calculate for yourself how many chances you have of winning that!”

He turned to go but the invalid limped after him holding onto his coat.

“Try it anyway professor,” he begged. “We need to live too!”

“No,” cried the Privy Councilor.

Still the peddler wouldn’t give up. “I have a feeling that you are going to win!”

“You always have that feeling!” said the Privy Councilor.

“Let the little one choose a ticket, she brings luck!” insisted Brambach.

That stopped the professor. “I will do it,” he murmured.

“Come over here Alraune! He cried. “Choose a ticket.”

The child skipped up. The invalid carefully made a fan out of his tickets and held them in front of her.

“Close your eyes,” he commanded. “Now, pick one.”

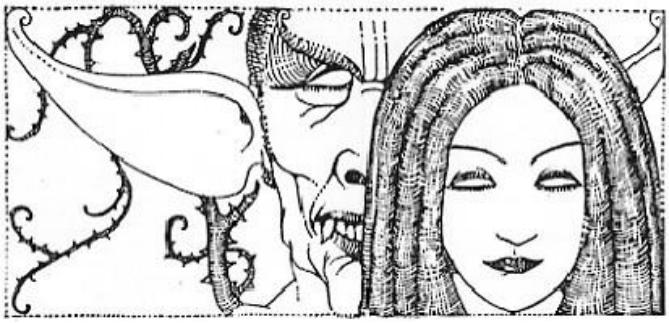
Alraune drew a ticket and gave it to the Privy Councilor. He considered for a moment and then waved the boy over.

“You choose one too, Wölfchen,” he said.

In the leather volume his Excellency ten Brinken reports that he won fifty thousand Marks in the Dülmen church raffle. Unfortunately he could not be certain whether Alraune or Wölfchen had selected the winning ticket. He had put them both together in his desk without writing the names of the

children on them. Still he scarcely had any doubt that it must have been Alraune’s.

As for the rest, he mentions how grateful he was to old Brambach who almost forced him to bring this money into the house. He gave him five Marks and set things up with the local relief fund for aged and disabled veterans so that he would receive a regular pension of thirty Marks per year.



Chapter Seven

Shares the things that occurred when Alraune was a young girl.

FROM the time she was eight years old until she was twelve Alraune ten Brinken was raised in the Sacré Couer convent in Nancy. From then until her seventeenth birthday she lived at Mlle. de Vynteelen's finishing school for young ladies on Du Marteau Avenue in Spa. During this time she went to the ten Brinken home twice a year to spend her vacations.

At first the Privy Councilor tried to have her taught at home. He hired a girl to teach the child, then a tutor and soon after that another one. But even with the best intentions in a short time they all despaired of ever teaching her anything. It was simply not going to happen. It was not something they could point out. She was not wild or unruly. She just never answered and there was nothing that could break through her stubborn silence.

just sat there quiet and still, staring straight ahead and blinking with half-open eyes. You could scarcely tell if she was even listening. She would pick up the slate in her hand but she would not move it, not up, down, or to make a letter–If she did use it, it was to draw some strange animal with ten legs or a face with three eyes and two noses.

What she learned at all she learned before the Privy Councilor sent her to the convent, before her separation from Wölfchen. This same boy that failed miserably in every class in school and looked down with contempt on any schoolwork had an unending patience with his sister at home.

She had him write long rows of numbers, write out his name and her name hundreds of times and she enjoyed it when he made a mistake, when his dirty little fingers cramped up on him. It was for this purpose that she

would take up the slate, the pencil or the writing quill. She would learn a number, a word or its opposite, grasp it quickly, write it down, and then let the boy copy it for hours. She always found something to correct, there, that stroke was not right. She played the teacher–so she learned.

Then one day the principal came out to complain to the Privy Councilor about the pathetic performance of his foster son. Wölfchen was especially weak in the sciences.

Alraune heard this and from then on played school with him, controlled him, made him study till dark, listened to him recite his lessons and made him learn. She would put him in his room, close the door and not let him come out until he had finished off his homework.

She acted as if she knew everything already and would not tolerate any doubt of her superiority. She learned very easily and quickly. She did not want to show any weakness in front of the boy so she took up one book after another grasping its contents and moving on to the next in a wild and chaotic manner without tying them together. This went on until the youth would come to her when he didn’t know something. He would ask her to explain it to him because she must surely know it. Then she would put him off, scold him and tell him to think it over.

That gave her some time to search in her books. If she couldn’t find the answer she would run off to the Privy Councilor and ask him.

Then she would come back to the boy and ask if the answer had occurred to him yet. If it hadn’t she would finally give him the answer. The professor noticed the game and it amused him. He would have never even considered placing the girl out of the home if the princess hadn’t kept pressuring him again and again.

The princess had always been a good Catholic and it seemed as if she became more devout with every Kilo of fat that she put on. She was insistent that her Godchild must be brought up in a convent. The Privy Councilor had been her financial advisor for several years now and invested her millions almost as if they were his own. He thought it prudent to go

along with her on this point. So Alraune went to the Sacré Couer convent in Nancy.

There were several exceptionally short entries in the Privy Councilor's hand during this period and several long reports from the Mother Superior. The professor grinned as he filed them, especially the first ones that praised the girl and the extraordinary progress she was making. He knew his convents and knew very well that a person could not learn anything of this world among these pious sisters.

He enjoyed how the first letters filled with the praise that all the parents received very soon took a different tone. The Mother Superior reported more and more urgently on various cruelties and these complaints always had the same basis. It was not the behavior of the girl herself, not her performance in giving presentations. It was always about the influence she exerted on her schoolmates.

"It is entirely true," writes the Reverend Mother, "that the child herself never tortures animals. At least she has never been caught at it–But it is equally true that all the little cruelties committed by the other girls originate in her head.

First there was little Mary, a well-behaved and obedient child that was caught in the convent garden blowing up frogs with hollow grass stems. When she was called to account for her actions she confessed that Alraune had given her the idea. We didn't want to believe it at first and thought it was much more likely that she was trying to shift the blame away from herself.

But very soon after that two different girls were discovered sprinkling salt on some large slugs so that they writhed in agony as they slowly dissolved into slime. Now slugs are also God's creatures and again these two children declared that Alraune had pushed them into it. I then questioned her myself and the child admitted everything and went on to explain that she had once heard that about slugs and wanted to see if it was really true. As for the blowing up of frogs, she said that it sounded so beautiful when you smashed a blown up frog with a stone. Of course she

would never do it herself because some of the crushed frog might squirt onto her hands.

When I asked whether she understood that she had done wrong she declared No, she had not done anything wrong and what the other children did had nothing at all to do with her."

At this place in the report in parentheses the Privy Councilor wrote, "She is absolutely correct!"

"Despite being punished," the letter continues, "a short time later we had several other deplorable cases that we determined must have originated from Alraune.

For example, Clara Maasen of Düren, a girl several years older than Alraune. She has been in our care for four years now and never given the slightest cause for complaint. She took a mole and poked its eyes out with a red-hot knitting needle. She was so upset over what she had done that she spent the next few days extremely agitated and bursting into tears for no reason at all. She only calmed down again after she had received absolution during her next confession.

Alraune explained that moles creep around in the dark earth and it doesn't matter if they can see or not.

Then we found very ingeniously constructed bird traps in the garden. Thank God no little birds had been caught in them yet. No one would tell us where she had gotten the idea. Only under the threat of severe punishment did some girls finally admit that Alraune had enticed them into doing it and at the same time threatened to do something to them if they told on her.

Unfortunately this unholy influence of the child on her schoolmates has now grown to the point where we can scarcely find out the truth anymore.

Helene Petiot was caught at recess carefully cutting the wings off of flies, ripping their legs off and throwing them alive onto an anthill. The little girl said that she had come up with the idea herself and stuck with her

story in front of His Reverence, swearing that Alraune had nothing to do with it.

Her cousin Ninon lied just as stubbornly yesterday after she had tied a tin pot to the tail of our good old cat and almost drove it insane. Nevertheless we are convinced that Alraune had her hand in that game as well."

The Mother Superior then wrote further that she had called a conference together and everyone had concluded the best thing was to respectfully beg his Excellency to take his daughter away from the convent and come as soon as possible to get her.

The Privy Councilor answered that he very much regretted the incidents but must beg them to keep the child a little while longer at the convent.

"The more difficult the work, the greater the reward."

He had no doubt that the patience and piety of the sisters would be successful in clearing the weeds out of the heart of his child and turn it into a beautiful garden of the Lord. The reason he did this was to see if the influence of this sensitive child was stronger than the discipline of the convent and all the efforts of the pious sisters.

He knew very well that the cheap Sacré Couer convent did not draw from the best families and that it was very happy to count the daughter of his Excellency as one of its students. He was not mistaken. The Reverend Mother replied that with God's help they would try once more. All the sisters had declared themselves willing to include a special plea for Alraune in their evening prayers. In generosity the Privy Councilor sent them a hundred Marks for their charities.

During the next vacation the professor carefully observed the little girl. He knew the Gontram family from the Great-grandfather down and knew that they all took in a great love for animals with their mother's milk. He felt that her influence on this much older boy would at last meet its match, become powerless against this innermost feeling of unlimited goodness.

Yet he caught Wölfchen Gontram one afternoon down by the little pond under the trumpet tree. He was kneeling on the ground. In front of him sat a large frog on a stone. The youth had lit a cigarette and shoved it in the wide mouth and deep down its throat. The frog smoked in deathly fear, swallowing the smoke, pulling it down into its belly. It inhaled more and more but couldn't push it back out so it became larger and larger.

Wölfchen stared at it, fat tears running down his cheeks. But he lit another cigarette when the first one burned down, removed the stub from the frog's throat and with shaking fingers pushed the fresh one back into its mouth. The frog swelled up monstrously, quivering in agony, its eyes popping out of their sockets. It was a strong animal and endured two and a half cigarettes before it exploded.

The youth screamed in misery as if his own pain were much greater than that of the animal he had just tortured to death. He sprang back as if he wanted to run away into the bushes, looked around and then quickly ran back when he saw that the torn body of the frog was still moving. Wild and despairing he crushed it to death with his heel to free it from its misery.

The Privy Councilor took him by the ear and searched his pockets. He found a few more cigarettes and the boy confessed to taking them from the writing desk in the library. But he could not be moved to tell how he had known that smoking frogs would inflate themselves until they finally explode. No amount of urging worked and the rich beating that the professor gave him through the garden didn't help either. He remained silent.

Alraune stubbornly denied everything as well even after one of the maids declared she had seen the child taking the cigarettes. Despite everything they both stuck to their stories; the boy, that he had stolen the cigarettes and the girl, that she had not done anything.

Alraune stayed at the convent for one more year. Then in the middle of the school year she was sent home and certainly this time unjustly. Only the superstitious sisters believed that she was guilty and just maybe the Privy Councilor suspected it a little as well. But no reasonable person would have.

Once before illness had broken out at Sacré Couer. That time it had been the measles and fifty-seven little girls lay sick in their beds. Only a few like Alraune ran around healthy. But this time it was much worse. It was a typhoid epidemic. Eight children and one nun died. Almost all of the others became sick.

But Alraune ten Brinken had never been so healthy. During this time she put on weight, positively blossomed and gaily ran around through all the sick rooms. No one troubled themselves over her during these weeks as she ran up and down the stairs, sat on all the beds and told the children that they were going to die the next day and go to hell. While she, Alraune would continue to live and go to heaven.

She gave away all of her pictures of the saints telling the sick girls that they could diligently pray to the Madonna and to the sacred heart of Jesus– but it wouldn't do them any good. They would still heartily burn and roast– It was simply amazing how vividly she could describe these torments. Sometimes when she was in a good mood she would be generous. Then she would promise them only a hundred thousand years in purgatory. That was bad enough for the minds of the pious sick little girls.

The doctor finally unceremoniously threw Alraune out of the rooms. The sisters were absolutely convinced that she had brought the illness into the convent and sent her head over heels back home.

The professor was tickled and laughed over this report. He became a little more serious when shortly after the child's arrival two of his maids contracted typhus and both soon died in the hospital.

He wrote an angry letter to the supervisor of the convent and complained bitterly that under the existing circumstances they should have never sent the little one back home. He refused to pay the tuition payment for the last half of the year and energetically insisted that he be reimbursed for the monies he had put out for his two sick maids–From a sanitary point of view the sisters should not have been permitted to act as they had done.

His Excellency ten Brinken did not handle things much differently. While he was not exactly afraid of contagion, like all doctors he would

much rather observe illness in others than in his own body. He let Alraune stay in Lendenich only until he found a good finishing school in the city. By the fourth day he had already sent her to Spa, to the illustrious Institute of Mlle. de Vynteelen.

Silent Aloys had to escort her. As far as the child was concerned the trip went without incident but he did have two little incidents to report. On the train trip there he had found a pocket book with several pieces of silver and on the trip back home he had slammed his finger in the compartment door of the car he was riding in. The Privy Councilor nodded in satisfaction at Aloy's report.

The Head Mistress was Fräulein Becker who had grown up in the University City on the Rhine and always went back there on her vacations. She had much to relate to the Privy Councilor over the years that Alraune stayed with her.

Right from the first day that Alraune arrived in the ancient building on Marteau Avenue her dominion began and it was not only imposed on her schoolmates. It was also imposed on the instructors, most especially over the Miss, who after only a few weeks had become a plaything for the absurd moods of the little girl, without any will of her own.

At breakfast on that very first day Alraune declared that she didn't like honey and marmalade and much more preferred butter. Naturally Mlle. de Vynteelen didn't give her any. It was only a few days until several of the other girls began to crave butter as well. Finally a large cry for butter went up throughout the entire Institute.

Even Miss Paterson, who had never in her life enjoyed anything with her morning tea other than toast with jam suddenly felt an uncontrollable desire for butter. So the principal had been obliged to give in to the demand for butter but on that very same day Alraune acquired a preference for orange marmalade.

In response to the Privy Councilor's pointed question Fräulein Becker declared that the torturing of animals never came up during those years at the Vynteelen School. At least no incidents had ever been discovered. On

the other hand, Alraune had made the lives of the other children miserable as well as those of all the instructors, both male and female.

Especially the poor music instructor who always placed his snuffbox on the mantel in the hall during class so he would not be tempted to use it. From the moment of Alraune's entrance into the school the most remarkable things had been found in it. For example, thick spider webs, wood lice, gunpowder, pepper, writing sand black with ink and once even a chopped up millipede. Several girls were caught doing it and punished–but never Alraune.

Yet she always showed a passive resistance toward the musician, never practiced and during class laid her hands in her lap and never raised them to play an instrument. But when the professor finally complained in despair to the principal Alraune quietly declared that the old man was lying. At that point Mlle. de Vynteelen personally attended the next hour and saw that the little girl knew her lesson exquisitely, could play better than any of the others and showed a remarkable talent.

The Head Mistress reproached the music instructor heavily. He stood there speechless and could say nothing other than, "But it is incredible, incredible!"

From then on the little schoolgirls only called him "Monsieur Incredible". They called after him whenever they saw him and pronounced the words like he did, as if they didn't have any teeth in their mouths either.

As for the Miss, she scarcely ever experienced a quiet day. New stupid pranks were always being played on her. They sprinkled itch powder in her bed and one time after a picnic placed a half dozen fleas in it. Then the key to her wardrobe was missing, then the hooks and eyelets were torn from the dress that she wanted to wear. Once as she was going to bed she was almost frightened to death by an effervescent powder reaction in her chamber pot. Another time so many stinging insects flew through her open window that she screamed out for help. Then the chair she sat on was smeared with paint or with glue or she found a dead mouse or an old chicken head in her pocket.

And so it merrily continued, the poor Miss could hardly enjoy an hour of her life. Investigations took place and those girls found guilty were always punished but it was never determined to be Alraune even though everyone was convinced that she was the mastermind behind all the pranks.

The only one that angrily rejected this suspicion was the English woman herself. She swore the girl was innocent up until the day she left the de Vynteelen Institute.

“This hell,” she said, “only shelters one sweet little angel.”

The Privy Councilor grinned as he noted in the leather volume, “That sweet little angel is Alraune.”

As for herself, Fräulein Becker related to the Professor that she had avoided coming into contact with the strange little creature from the very start. That had been easy for her since she was mostly occupied in working with the French and English students. She only had to instruct Alraune in gymnastics and sewing. As for the latter subject, she had quickly exempted her from it when she had seen that not only did Alraune have no interest in sewing, she showed a downright aversion to it.

But in calisthenics, which by the way Alraune always excelled in, she always acted as if she never noticed the joking around the child did. She only once had a little confrontation with her and that was just after Alraune’s entrance into the school. She had to confess that unfortunately Araune had gotten the better of her.

By chance she had overheard Alraune telling her schoolmates about her stay in the convent. The boasting and cheeky bragging was so abominable that she took it as her duty to intervene. On one hand the little one told how splendid and magnificent the convent was and on the other hand she told truly murderous stories about the various misdeeds of the pious sisters.

She herself had been brought up in the Sacré Couer convent in Nancy and knew very well how simple and plain it was and knew as well that the nuns were the most harmless creatures in the world. So she called Alraune

into her office and reproached her for telling such fraudulent stories. She also demanded that the girl immediately tell her schoolmates that she had not been telling the truth. When Alraune stubbornly refused, she declared that she would tell them herself.

At that Alraune rose up on her toes, looked straight at her and quietly said, “If you tell them that, Fräulein, I will tell them that your mother has a little cheese shop in her home.”

Fräulein Becker confessed that she had become weak and given in to a false shame. She let the child have her way. There had been something so deliberate and calculated in the soft voice of the child in that moment that she had become afraid. She left Alraune standing there and went to her room happy to avoid an outright quarrel with the little creature.

It wasn’t long before she received her deserved punishment for denying her good mother. By the next day Alraune had already told all the students about her mother’s cheese shop and it cost a lot of effort to again win back the respect which she lost throughout the Institute.

But things were much worse for Alraune’s schoolmates then they were for the instructors. There was not one student in the entire school that had not suffered because of her. Strangely enough it appeared that every new bit of mischief seemed to make her even more popular. She made a point to sacrifice everyone that appeared to stand against her until they were all on her side. She was more popular than any of the other girls.

Fräulein Becker reported some of the worst cases to the Privy Councilor and they were mentioned in the leather volume.

Blanche de Banville had just returned from vacation with her parents in Picardy. The hot-blooded fourteen-year-old had fallen head over heels in love with her cousin who was the same age as she was. She wrote to him from Spa as well and he answered, addressing her letters B.d.B., hold at post office until claimed by addressee. Then he must have found something better to do with his time, in any case no more letters came.

Both Alraune and little Louison knew about her secret. Naturally Blanche was very unhappy and cried through entire nights. Louison sat with her and tried to comfort her. But Alraune declared that it was wrong to console her, her cousin had been unfaithful and betrayed her. Now Blanche needed to die of unrequited love. That was the only way to repay her false lover and make things right. Then for the rest of his life he would be tormented by the furies. She knew several famous stories where it had been like that.

Blanche was agreeable to the dying part but it did not go well. Food always tasted good to her despite her great pain. That's when Alraune declared that if Blanche couldn't die of a broken hearth she must find some other way to bring it about. She recommended a dagger or a pistol–but they didn't have either one.

Blanche could not be persuaded to jump out the window, push a hatpin into her heart or hang herself. She just wanted to swallow something, nothing else. Soon Alraune had some new advice. There was a bottle of Lysol in Mlle. de Vynteelen's medicine chest–Louison must steal it. Unfortunately there was only a little bit left in the bottle so Louison had to scratch the phosphorus heads off a couple boxes of matches as well.

Blanche wrote several farewell letters, one to her parents, the principal and her traitorous lover. Then she drank the Lysol and swallowed the matchheads–They both tasted horrible enough. Just to be certain Alraune had her swallow three packets of needles–She herself, by the way, was not present at this suicide attempt. She had gone to her room under the pretence of being a lookout after Blanche had sworn on the crucifix to follow her instructions exactly.

That evening little Louison sat on the bed with her friend. Crying miserably she handed over first the Lysol, then the match heads and finally the packets of needles. Blanche became very ill from these threefold poisons and was soon writhing and screaming in pain. Louison screamed with her and their screams roared through the entire house. Then she ran out of the room and fetched the Head Mistress and the teachers yelling that Blanche was dying.

Blanche de Banville did not die. A capable doctor quickly gave her an effective emetic that brought the Lysol, phosphorus and needle packets back up again. Still, one of the needle packets had opened up in her stomach and a half dozen needles had gotten loose. They wandered through her body and in the course of her life came out again in all kinds of places painfully reminding the little suicide of her first love.

Blanche lay in bed sick for a long time and had a lot of pain. It appeared that she had been punished enough. Everyone sympathized with her, was good to her and granted her slightest wish. She wished for nothing else but that her two friends that had helped her, Alraune and little Louison, not be punished. She pleaded and begged for so long that the principal finally promised. That was why Alraune was not thrown out of the school.

Then it was Hilde Aldekerk's turn. She loved the Berlin style cakes that were sold in the German confectionery at Place Royal. She claimed she could eat twenty. Alraune bet that she couldn't polish off thirty. Whoever lost the bet had to pay for the cakes. Hilde Aldekerk won–but she got so sick that she had to stay in bed fourteen days.

"Glutton," said Alraune ten Brinken. "It serves you right!"

From that point on the only thing all the little girls called fat, round Hilda was "Glutton". She howled about it for awhile but then got used to her new nickname and finally became one of Alraune's most faithful companions, just like Blanche de Banville.

Fräulein Becker reported that Alraune had only one time been seriously punished at the school and strangely enough, unjustly. On a full moon night the French teacher stumbled out of her room terrified. She woke the entire household with her screams and yelled that a white ghost was sitting on the balustrade of her balcony. No one would go into her room until they finally woke up the porter who armed himself with a club and went inside.

The ghost turned out to be Alraune who was sitting there in her white night gown and staring with wide-open eyes into the moon. She could not say how she got there. The principal took the playing ghost as a very bad

prank. Only much later did it come out that the girl had been seen on several different occasions sleep walking under the influence of the full moon.

Interestingly enough Alraune accepted this unjust punishment–to copy a chapter out of “Tèlèmaque”–without protest and conscientiously carried it out on a free afternoon. She would have most certainly rebelled and resisted any just punishment.

Fräulein Becker concluded, “I fear that your Excellency will not experience much joy from your daughter in the future.”

The Privy Councilor replied, “That might well be, but up to now I believe that I am very well satisfied with her.”

He did not let Alraune come home for vacation the last two years. Instead he permitted her to travel with her school friends, once to Scotland with Maude McPherson, then with Blanche to her parents in Paris and finally with the two Rodenburgs to their family estate in Münster.

He didn’t have any reports from these episodes in Alraune’s life and could only imagine how she occupied herself during these vacations. It was a satisfaction to him to think of how this creature he had created extended her influence outward in ever expanding circles.

In the newspaper he read that during the summer in which Alraune was at Boltenhagen the green and white colors of the old Count Rodenberg did exceedingly well at the track and his stud brought in a considerable winnings.

He also learned that Mlle. de Vynteelen had received an unexpected inheritance that placed her in the position of needing to close the school so she didn’t take any new students and only kept her old students until they graduated.

He attributed both of these things to the presence of Alraune and was half convinced that she brought gold into the other houses she had stayed at, the convent in Nancy, at Reverend McPherson in Edinburgh and the home

of the Banvilles on Haussmann Boulevarde. She had made good threefold on her little deviltries.

He felt that all these people ought to feel gratitude to his child, this strange girl that went abroad out into the world bringing gifts and strewing roses upon the life paths of all those that had the fortune to meet her. He laughed as it occurred to him that those roses also had sharp thorns capable on inflicting many beautiful wounds as well.

“By the way,” he asked Fräulein Becker. “How are things going with your dear mother?”

“Why thank you for asking, your Excellency,” she answered. “Mother can’t complain. Her business has grown considerably better during the last few years!”

“Really,” said the Privy Councilor and he gave orders that all cheeses, the Emmenthall, Roquefort, Chester and old Höllander, from now on were to be purchased from Frau Becker on Münster Street.

Chapter Eight

Details how Alraune became Mistress of the House of Brinken.

WHEN Alraune once more returned to the house on the Rhine that was sacred to St. Nepomuk the Privy Councilor ten Brinken was seventy-six years old. But that was only calendar age. There was no weakness or even the smallest amount of pain to remind him of it. He felt warm and sunny in the old village that was now threatened to be seized by the growing fingers of the city.

He hung like a fat spider in the strong web of his power as it extended out in all directions and he felt a light titillation at Alraune's home coming. She would be a welcome plaything for his whims and equally amusing bait that should entice many more stupid flies and moths into his web.

When Alraune came she didn't appear that much different to the old man than she had been as a child. He studied her for a long time as she sat in front of him in the library and found nothing that reminded him of her father or her mother.

The young girl was petite, pretty, slender, narrow-chested and not yet developed. Her figure was like that of a boy's as were her quick, somewhat awkward movements. He thought she looked like a doll, only her head was not a doll's head at all. Her cheekbones protruded, her pale thin lips stretched over her little teeth.

But her hair fell rich and full, not red like her mother's, but heavy and chestnut brown like that of Frau Josefe Gontram, thought the Privy Councilor. Then it occurred to him that it had been in that house where the idea of Alraune first originated.

He squinted over across where she still sat, observing her critically like a picture, watching her, searching for memories–

Yes, her eyes, they opened wide under saucy thin eyebrows that arched across her smooth narrow forehead. They looked cool and derisive and yet at times soft and dreamy, grass green, hard as steel– like the eyes of his nephew Frank Braun.

The professor shoved out his broad lower lip. That particular discovery did not please him at all– Then he shrugged his shoulders. Why shouldn't the youth who had first conceived of her not share this with her? It was little enough and very dearly bought considering the round millions that this quiet girl had taken from him–

"You have bright eyes," he said.

She only nodded.

He continued, "And your hair is beautiful. Wölfchen's mother had hair like that."

Then Alraune said, "I'm going to cut it off."

The Privy Councilor commanded, "You will not do that, do you hear?"

But when she came to the evening meal her hair was cut. She looked like a page, her locks falling in curls around her boy's head.

"Where is your hair?" he cried at her.

Calmly she said, "Here."

She showed him a large cardboard box. In it lay the shiny meter long bundles of hair.

He began, "Why did you cut it off?–Because I forbid it?–Out of defiance then?"

Alraune smiled, "No, not at all. I would have done it anyway."

“Then why?” he enquired.

She picked up the box and took out the seven long bundles. Each one was tied and wrapped with a golden cord and there was a little card attached to it. There were seven names on these seven cards, Emma, Marguèrite, Louison, Evelyn, Anna, Maud and Andrea.

“Are those your school friends?” He asked. “You cut your hair off to send them a keepsake? You foolish child.”

He was angry at this unexpected teenage sentimentalism. It didn’t appeal to him at all. He had imagined the girl much more mature and cold-blooded.

She looked straight at him, “No,” she said. “I don’t care about them at all–only”–she hesitated–

“Only what?” urged the professor.

“Only,” she began again. “Only they should cut their hair off too!”

“Why should they?” cried the old man.

Then Alraune laughed, “–cut their hair completely off! Much more than I have, right down to the scalp. I’ll write them that I have cut my hair right to the scalp–and then they must do it as well!”

“They wouldn’t be that stupid,” he threw back.

“Oh yes they will,” she insisted. “I told them that we should all cut our hair off and they promised they would if I did it first. But I forgot all about it and only remembered again when you spoke of my hair.”

The Privy Councilor laughed at her, “People promise all kinds of things–but they won’t do them. You alone are the fool.”

Then she raised herself up from her chair and came up close to the old man.

“Yes they will,” she whispered hotly. “They will do it. They know very well that I will rip their hair out myself if they don’t–They are afraid of me, even when I’m not there.”

Stirred up and trembling slightly with emotion she stood there in front of him.

“Are you that certain they will do it?” he asked.

She answered with conviction, “Yes, absolutely certain.”

Then the same certainty grew in him as well and he didn’t even wonder why.

“So why did you do it then?” he asked.

In an instant she was transformed. All her strangeness had disappeared and she was once more just a moody and capricious child.

“Well,” she laughed shortly and her little hands stroked the full bundles of hair. “Well, you see–it’s like this. It hurts me, this heavy hair, and I sometimes get headaches from it. I also know that short hair looks good on me but it doesn’t look good on them at all. The senior class of Mademoiselle de Vynteelen will look like a monkey house! The other students will scream at them and call them fools and Mademoiselle will scold them. The new Miss and the Fräulein will scream at them and scold them as well.”

She clapped her hands together laughing brightly with glee.

“Will you help me?” she asked. “How should I send them?”

The Privy Councilor said, “Individually, as samples of no value and have them registered.”

She nodded, Alright, that’s what I will do!”

During the evening meal she described to him how the girls would look without their hair. The tall rangy Evelyn Clifford, had thin straight

light blonde hair and full-blooded Louison always wore her brown hair pinned up turban style. Then there were the two Rodenberg Countesses, Anna and Andrea. Their long curly locks encircled their hard bony Westfalen skulls.

“With all their hair gone,” she laughed, “they will look like Meerkats! Everyone will laugh when they see them.”

They went back to the library. The Privy Councilor helped her get the things she needed, got her cardboard boxes, twine, sealing wax and postage stamps. Then he smoked his cigar, chewing half of it while watching her write her letters, seven little letters to seven girls in Spa.

The old family crest of the Brinkens was on the top of each letter, John of Nepomuk, patron Saint and protector against floods, was in the upper field, below was a silver heron fighting with a serpent–The heron was the heraldic animal of the Brinkens.

He looked at her and a faint itch crept over his old skin. Old memories began to grow in him, lustful thoughts of half-grown boys and girls–She, Alraune, was both a boy and a girl. Moist spittle dribbled down from his fleshy lips, soaking into the black Havana. He squinted over at her, eager and full of trembling desire. In that minute he understood what it was that attracted people to this slender petite creature like the little fish that swim after the bait and don’t see the hook.

But he could see the sharp hook very well and thought he knew a way to avoid the hook and still consume the sweet morsel–

Wolf Gontram worked at the Privy Councilor’s office in the city. His foster father had taken him out of school after one year and stuck him in a bank as an apprentice. There he had forgotten everything he had so laboriously learned at school. He settled into his job and did just what was demanded of him. Then when his apprenticeship came to an end he went to the Privy Councilor’s office to work as a secretary.

It was a strange business, being a secretary for his Excellency. Karl Mohnen, Ph.D. four times over, was office manager and his old boss found

him useful enough. He still went through life looking for the right person to get married to. Wherever he went he made new acquaintances and hung out with the new set. But it never led to anything. His hair was long gone but his nose was still as good as always–he was always sniffing around for something, a woman for himself or a business opportunity for the Privy Councilor–and he was good at it.

A couple of accountants kept the books in order well enough to keep things going and there was a room that bore the sign “Legal Business”. Legal Councilor Gontram and Herr Manasse, who had not yet been promoted to Legal Councilor, sometimes spent an hour in it. They took care of the Privy Councilor’s ample lawsuits as they handsomely multiplied. Manasse took the hopeful ones that would end in a victory and the old Legal Councilor took the bad ones, prolonging them and postponing them until finally bringing them to an acceptable compromise.

Dr. Mohnen had his own office as well. Wolf Gontram sat in this office as his protégé and he sought to educate the boy in his own way. This man of the world knew a lot, scarcely less than little Manasse, but he never acted upon that knowledge or did anything with it.

He had gathered his information just like as a boy he had collected stamps, because his schoolmates were doing it. Now his stamp collection lay in a desk drawer someplace. Only when someone wanted to see a rare stamp did he take it out and flip through it.

“There, Saxony, red!”

Something had attracted him to Wolf Gontram. Perhaps it was the big black eyes that he had once loved when they belonged to Wolf’s mother. He loved them as well as he could considering how he loved five hundred other beautiful eyes as well. Yet the farther back his relationship with a woman, the greater it now appeared. Today he felt as if he had once had the most intimate trust of this woman whose son now worked with him even though he had not once even kissed her hand.

And so it came about that young Gontram took in all his little love stories and believed them. Not for one second did he doubt the doctor’s

heroic deeds and solidly held him up as the great seducer that he so terribly wanted to be himself.

Dr. Mohnen selected his wardrobe, showed him how to tie a bowtie and made him elegant–as much as he understood elegant–

He gave him books, took him with to the theater and to concerts in order to always have a grateful audience for his stories. He held himself to be a man of the world and wanted to make Wolf Gontram into one as well. And it was no lie that the Gontram youth had him alone to thank for everything that he became. Dr. Mohnen was the teacher that was needed, that demanded nothing and always gave day after day. Minute by minute without even knowing it he fashioned a new life for Wolf Gontram.

Wolf Gontram was beautiful, everyone in the city could see that except Karl Mohnen who thought beauty was only possible in tight association with skirts and to whom everything was beautiful that wore long hair and nothing else.

But the others saw it. Even when he was going to school old Gentlemen turned as he went by and squinted after him, officers glanced at him and turned pale whenever he was around. Many a well-groomed head with jaded tastes sighed–and quickly suppressed the hot desire and longing that screamed inside them. But now the glances came from under veils or grand hats. The beautiful eyes of women now followed the young man.

“That must be nice!” growled little Manasse as he sat in the park with the Legal Councilor and his son listening to a concert. “If she doesn’t turn back around soon her neck will really hurt!”

“Who are you taking about?” asked the Legal Councilor.

“Who? Her Royal Highness!” cried the attorney. “Look over there Herr Colleague. She’s been staring at your rascal for the last half hour, craning her neck around to look at him.”

“God, just let her be,” answered the Legal Councilor good-naturedly.

But little Manasse wouldn’t give up.

“Sit over here Wolf!” he commanded and the young man obeyed sitting beside him and turning his back to the princess.

Yes, this beauty frightened the little attorney. He felt that it was a mask and he could hear death laughing behind it just as he believed it had done for the boy’s mother. And that pained him, tortured him until he almost hated the young man, even as he had once loved his mother. This hatred was strange enough, it was a nightmare, a burning desire that young Gontram’s fate would soon be fulfilled, that it would happen suddenly– much better today than tomorrow.

Still it was the attorney that tried to liberate the boy from his fate if he could and did everything possible to help, to smooth his life out as much as possible. When his Excellency ten Brinken stole his foster son’s fortune he was beside himself.

“You are a fool! An Idiot!”

He barked at the Legal Councilor. He dearly wanted to nip at his heels like his poor dead hound, Cyclops, had done and he set down to the father in smallest detail every way his son had been swindled, one after the other.

The Privy Councilor had taken over the vineyards and fields that Wolf had inherited from his aunt and scarcely paid fair market price for them. Then he had discovered no less than three mineral springs on those same grounds that he now bottled and profited from.

“We would have never thought of that,” responded the Legal Councilor quietly.

The little attorney spit in anger. “That doesn’t matter! The properties are worth six times as much today and the old swindler didn’t even pay that. He deducted over half of the price for the boy’s upkeep. It is an obscenity–”

But it made no impression at all on the Legal Councilor. He was a good man, so full of goodness that he only saw the goodness in others as

well. He was ready to find a bit of it in the lowest criminals no matter what their crimes. So he thought highly of the Privy Councilor for hiring the boy to work in his offices. Then he threw in his trump card. The Privy Councilor himself had told him that he wanted to remember his son sufficiently in his will.

“Him? Him?” The attorney became bright red with restrained anger and plucked at the gray stubble of his beard.

“He won’t leave the boy one copper!”

But the Legal Councilor closed the debate, “Besides, a Gontram has never gone bad as long as the Rhine has flowed.” And in that he was completely right.

Every evening since Alraune returned Wolf rode out to Lendenich. Dr. Mohnen procured a horse for him from his friend, cavalry captain, Count Geroldingen, who placed it at his disposal. His mentor also had the young man learn dancing and fencing.

“A man of the world must know these things,” he declared and told of wild rides, triumphant duels and huge successes in ball rooms even though he himself had never climbed on a horse, never stood in front of a sword and could scarcely skip to the polka.

Wolf Gontram would bring the count’s horse to the stables and then walk across the courtyard to the mansion. He always brought one rose, never more than one. That’s what Dr. Mohnen had taught him. But it was always the most beautiful rose in the entire city.

Alraune would take his rose and slowly pluck it. Every evening it went that way. She would fold the petals together in her hands and then blow them explosively against his forehead and his cheeks. That was the favor she granted him. He did not demand anything else. He dreamed of having her–but not once did he act on those dreams and his unmastered desire circled and filled the room.

Wolf Gontram followed the strange creature that he loved like a shadow. She called him Wölfchen like she had done as a child.

“Because you are such a big dog,” she declared. “with long shaggy black hair and very handsome. You also have such deep, trusting and questioning eyes–that’s why! Because you are not good for anything Wölfchen, other than to run behind me and carry my things.”

Then she would call him over to lie down in front of her chair and she would put her little feet on his breast, stroke him across the cheeks with her soft doe-skin shoes, then throw them off and poke the tips of her toes between his lips.

“Kiss, kiss,” and she laughed as he kissed all around the fine silk stockings that enclosed her feet.

The Privy Councilor squinted at young Gontram with a sour smile. He was as ugly as the boy was beautiful–He knew that very well, but he was not afraid that Alraune would fall in love with him. It was just that his constant presence was uncomfortable to him.

“He doesn’t need to come over here every night,” he grumbled.

“Yes he does!” responded Alraune–so Wölfchen came.

The professor thought, “Very well then, my boy, swallow the hook!”

So Alraune became mistress of the house of Brinken from the very first day she came back from school. She was the mistress and yet remained a stranger, remained an outsider, a thing that would not grow in this ancient earth, not in this community that had planted roots and breathed the ancient air.

The servants, the maids, the coachman and the gardener only called her Fräulein and so did all the people of the village. They would say, “There goes the Fräulein,” and said it as if she came from somewhere else and was only visiting. But Wolf Gontram called her the young Master.

The shrewd Privy Councilor noticed these things at once and it occurred to him that the people sensed she was different. He wrote in the leather volume, “and the animals sense it too! The animals–the horses and the hounds, the slender roe-buck that runs around in the garden and even the little squirrels that scurry through the tops of the trees.”

Wolf Gonram was their great friend. They raised their heads and ran up to him when he was near. But they slunk quietly away when the Fräulein was with him.

Her influence extended only to people thought the professor. Animals are immune and he counted the farmers and servants among the animals. They had the same healthy instincts, he reflected, some instinctive dislike that was half fear.

She can be very happy that she was born into this world now and not five centuries ago. She would have been accused of being a witch in a month’s time in this little village of Lendenich–and the Bishop would have been given a good roast.

This aversion of the people and animals toward Alraune delighted the old gentleman almost as much as the strange attraction she exerted on the higher born. He always noted new examples of this affection and hatred even though he did find exceptions in both camps.

From the records of the Privy Councilor it shows that he was convinced there was some factor in Alraune that brought about a sharp and well-defined influence on her surroundings. The professor was inclined to gather evidence that would support his hypothesis and to reject any thing that didn’t.

As a result his manuscript was much less a report over the things she did–than a relating of what others did under her influence. It was primarily an account of the people that came in contact with her, and how they played out the life of the creature Alraune.

To the Privy Councilor she was a true phantom, an unreal thing that had no real life of her own, a shadow creature that reflected the ultraviolet

radiation of others back at them, causing them to do the things they did.

He doggedly pursued this idea and never really believed that she was human at all. He even spoke to her as if she were an unreal thing that he had given a body and form, as if she were a bloodless doll that he had given a living mask. That flattered his old vanity and was why Alraune affected his life more than she did any of the others.

So he polished his doll and made her more colorful and beautiful each day. He allowed her to be mistress and submitted to her wishes and moods just like the others, but with this difference. He always believed he had the game in hand, was firmly convinced that ultimately it was only his individual will that was being reflected back and expressed through the medium of Alraune.

Chapter Nine

Speaks of Alraune's lovers and what happened to them.

THESE were the five men that loved Alraune ten Brinken: Karl Mohnen, Hans Geroldingen, Wolf Gontram, Jakob ten Brinken and Raspe, the chauffeur. The Privy Councilor's brown volume speaks of them all and this story of Alraune must speak of them as well.

Raspe, Matthieu-Maria Raspe, came with the Opel automobile that Princess Wolkonski gave to Alraune on her seventeenth birthday. He had served with the Hussars but now he not only had to drive the car, he had to help the old coachman with the horses as well. He was married and had two little boys. Lisbeth, his wife, took care of the laundry in the house of ten Brinken. They lived in the little cottage near the library right beside the iron-gated entrance to the courtyard.

Matthieu was blonde, big and strong. He understood his work and used his head as well as his hands. The horses obeyed his touch just as well as the automobile did. Early one morning he saddled the Irish mare of his Mistress, stood in the courtyard and waited. The Fräulein slowly came down the steps from the mansion. She was dressed as a young boy wearing yellow leather gaiters, a gray riding suit and a little riding cap to cover her hair.

She did not use the stirrup but had him lace his fingers together, stepped into them and stayed like that for a short second before swinging herself up astride the saddle. Then she hit the horse a sharp blow with the whip so that it reared up and tore out through the open gate. Mattheiu-Maria had all kinds of trouble mounting his heavy chestnut gelding and catching up to her.

Brown haired Lisbeth closed the gate behind them. She pressed her lips together and watched them go–her husband whom she loved and Fräulein ten Brinken whom she hated.

Somewhere out in the meadow the Fräulein came to a stop, turned around and let him catch up.

“Where should we ride today, Matthieu-Maria?” she asked.

He said, “Wherever the Fräulein commands.”

Then she tore the mare around and galloped further.

“Jump Nellie!” she cried.

Raspe hated these morning rides no less than his wife did. It was as if the Fräulein rode alone, as if he were only air, a part of the landscape, or as if he did not exist at all to his mistress. But then when she did take the trouble to notice him for even a second he felt still more annoyed. For then it was certain that she was going to demand something unusual of him once more.

She stopped at the Rhine and waited quietly until he came up to her side. He rode as slow as he could, knowing that she had come up with some new notion and hoped she would forget it by the time he got there. But she never forgot a notion.

“Matthieu-Maria,” she said, “should we swim across?”

He raised objections knowing ahead of time that it would be useless.

“The banks on the other side are too steep,” he said. “You can’t climb back up out of the water, especially right here where the current is so rapid and–”

He got angry. It was all so pointless, the things his mistress did. Why should they ride across the Rhine? They would get all wet and cold. He would be lucky not to come down with a cold from it. It was all for nothing,

once more for nothing. He made up his mind to stay behind. She could do her foolishness alone. What was it to him? He had a wife and children–

That was as far as he got before riding into the stream. He plunged deep into the water with his heavy Mecklenburger and had all kinds of trouble arriving safely somewhere onto the rocks on the other side. He shook himself off angrily and swore, then rode out of the stream at a sharp trot up to his mistress. She gave him a brief sardonic glance.

“Did you get wet, Matthieu-Maria?”

He remained quiet, insulted and angry. Why did she have to call him by his forename? Why was she so familiar with him? He was Raspe, the chauffeur, and not a stable boy. His brain found a dozen good replies but his lips didn’t speak them.

Another day they rode to the dunes where the Hussars practiced. That was even more embarrassing to him. Many of the officers and non-commissioned officers knew him from the time he had served with the regiment.

The mustached sergeant of the 2nd squadron called out derisively to him.

“Well Raspe, are you going to ride with us awhile?”

“The devil take that crazy female,” growled Raspe.

But he galloped along at the rear and during the attack rode at the side of the Fräulein. Then Count Geroldingen, cavalry captain, came over with his English piebald to chat with the Fräulein. Raspe stayed back but she spoke loud enough so that he could hear.

“Well count, how do you like my esquire?”

The cavalry captain laughed, “Splendid! Well suited for such a young prince as yourself!”

Raspe wanted to box his ears, the Fräulein's as well, and the sergeant's, and the entire squadron that was grinning at him. He was embarrassed and turned red as a schoolboy.

But the afternoons were even worse when he had to go driving with her in the automobile. He sat in his place behind the wheel squinting at the door and sighed in relief when someone came out of the house with her, suppressed a curse when she came out alone.

Often he had his wife find out if she wanted to go driving alone. Then he would quickly take a few parts out of the machine and lie under it on his back, greasing and cleaning them as if he were repairing something.

"We can't go driving today Fräulein," he would say.

Then he would smile in satisfaction after she was out of the garage. One time it didn't go so well for him. She stayed there in the garage quietly waiting. She didn't say anything, but it seemed to him as if she knew very well what he was up to. Then he slowly bolted everything back together.

"Ready?" she asked.

He nodded.

"You see," she said, "how better it goes when I'm here Matthieu-Maria."

When he came back from that drive, when his Opel was once more in the garage and he was setting down to the meal his wife set out for him, he trembled, he was pale and his eyes stared at nothing. Lisbeth didn't ask, she knew what it was about.

"That damned female!" he murmured.

She brought out the blonde, blue eyed boys to him, white in their fresh pajamas and set one on each knee. Slowly he became happy and at ease with his laughing children. Then after his boys were in bed, he sat outside on the stone bench smoking his cigarette, strolled through the village and

through the ancient garden of the Brinkens, talking things over with his wife.

“No good can come of it,” he said. “She rushes and rushes. No speed is fast enough for her. Fourteen speeding tickets in three weeks–”

“You don’t have to pay them,” said Frau Lisbeth.

“No,” he said. “But I am notorious for it. The police take out their notebooks whenever they see the white car with ‘I.Z.937’ on it!”

He laughed, “Well, they aren’t wrong in taking our number. We deserve every one of our tickets.”

He quieted, took a wrench out of his pocket and played with it. His wife pushed her arm under his, took his cap off and stroked back his tangled hair.

“What does she want anyway?” she asked.

She took pains to make her voice sound innocent and indifferent.

Raspe shook his head, “I don’t know Lisbeth. She is crazy. That’s what it is and she has some damned way about her that makes people do what she wants even when they are entirely against it and know that it is wrong.”

“What did she do today?” his wife asked.

He said, “No more than usual. She can’t stand to see another car in front of us. She must pass it and even if it has thirty more horsepower than ours, she wants to catch up to it. ‘Catch it,’ she says to me and if I hesitate she lightly touches my arm with her hand and I let loose as if the devil himself were driving the machine.”

He sighed, brushed the cigarette ash off his pants.

“She always sits next to me,” he continued. “and just her sitting there makes me really upset and nervous. All I can think about is what kind of foolishness she’s going to make me do this time. Her greatest joy is

jumping the car over obstacles, boards, sand piles and things like that. I'm no coward, but there should be some purpose to it if you are going to risk your life every day. 'Just drive,' she says. 'Nothing will happen to me.' She is calm when she jumps over a road ditch at one hundred kilometers/hour. It's possible that nothing can happen to her, but some time I'm going to make a mistake, tomorrow or the next day!"

Lisbeth pressed his hand. "You must simply try to not obey her. Say 'No' when she wants to do something stupid! You are not permitted to take such chances with your life. It is not fair to us, to me or the children."

He looked straight at her, still and calm. "I know that. It's not fair to you or even to myself. But you see, that's just it. I can not say 'No' to the Fräulein. Nobody can. Look how young Herr Gontram runs after her like a puppy dog, look at the way the others are happy to fulfill all of her foolish notions! Not one of all the people in the household can endure being around the Fräulein. Yet everyone of them will do what she wants even if it is stupid or disgusting."

"That's not true!" said Lisbeth. "Froitsheim, the coachman, won't, not at all."

He whistled, "Froitsheim! You're right. He turns around and walks away whenever he sees her. But he is almost ninety years old and hasn't had any blood in his body for a long time."

She looked at him in surprise, "Does she stir your blood then, Matthieu? Is that why you must do what she wants?"

He evaded her eyes and looked down at the ground. But then he took her hand and looked straight at her.

"Well you see Lisbeth, I don't know what it is. I've often thought about it, what it really is. When I see her I get so angry that I could strangle her. When she's not there I run around full of fear that she might call me."

He spit on the ground. "Damn it all!" he cried. "I wish I was rid of this job! Wish I had never accepted it."

They talked it over, turning it this way and that, weighing everything for and against it and finally they came to the conclusion that he should give his notice. But before doing that he should go into the city the very next day and look for a new position.

That night Frau Lisbeth slept peacefully for the first time in months but Matthieu-Maria didn't sleep at all. He requested a leave of absence the next morning and went to the job placement office in the city. He was really lucky. The agent took him to meet with a Councilor of the Chamber of Commerce that was looking for a chauffeur and he got the job. He received a higher salary than what he had been getting, fewer work hours and didn't have to do anything with horses.

As they stepped out of the house the agent congratulated him. But he had a feeling as if there was nothing he should be thankful for, as if he would never work at this new job.

Still, it made him happy to see his wife's eyes light up in joy when he told her.

"In fourteen days," he said. "If only the time was already gone!"

She shook her head. "No," she said firmly. "Not fourteen days. Do it tomorrow! You must insist, talk with the Privy Councilor."

"That won't do any good," he replied. "He would inform the Fräulein and then–"

Frau Lisbeth grasped his hand. "Leave it alone!" she decided. "I will speak with the Fräulein myself."

She left him standing there, went across the courtyard and announced herself. While she waited she considered exactly what she wanted to say so they would be permitted to leave that very morning. But she didn't need to say anything at all. The Fräulein only listened, heard that he wanted to go without notice, nodded curtly and said that it was all right.

Frau Lisbeth flew back to her man, embraced and kissed him.

“Only one more night and the bad dream will be over.”

They must pack quickly and he should telephone the Councilor to the Chamber of Commerce to tell him that he could begin his new job the next morning. They pulled the old trunk out from under the bed and her bright enthusiasm infected him. He pulled out his iron bound chest as well, dusted it off and helped her pack, passing things to her. He ran into the village to hire a boy to bring a cart for hauling things away. He laughed and was content for the first time in the house of ten Brinken.

Then, as he was taking a cook pot from the stove and wrapping it in newspaper Aloys, the servant, came.

He announced, “The Fräulein wants to go driving.”

Raspe stared at him and didn’t say a word.

“Don’t go!” cried his wife.

He said, “Please inform the Fräulein that as of today I am no longer–”

He didn’t finish. Alraune ten Brinken stood in the door.

She said, “Matthieu-Maria, I let you go tomorrow. Today you will go driving with me.”

Then she left and behind her went Raspe.

“Don’t go! Don’t go!” screamed Frau Lisbeth.

He could hear her screams but didn’t know who it was or where they came from. Frau Lisbeth fell heavily onto the bench. She heard both of their steps as they crossed the courtyard to the garage. She heard the iron gate creak open on its hinges, heard the auto as it drove out onto the street and heard as well the short blast of the horn. That was the farewell greeting her husband always gave each time he left for the city. She sat there with both hands on her lap and waited, waited until they brought him back. Four farmers carried him in on a mattress and laid him down in the middle of the room among the trunks and boxes. They undressed him, helped wash him

and did as the doctor commanded. His long white body was full of blood, dust and dirt.

Frau Lisbeth knelt beside him without words, without tears. The old coachman came and took the screaming boys away. Then the farmers left and finally the doctor as well. She never asked him, not with words or with her eyes. She already knew the answer that he would give.

Once in the middle of the night Raspe woke up and opened his eyes. He recognized her, asked for some water and she gave him some to drink.

“It is over,” he said weakly.

She asked, “What happened?”

He shook his head, “I don’t know. The Fräulein said, ‘Faster, Matthieu-Maria’. I didn’t want to do it. Then she laid her hand on mine and I felt her through my glove and I did it. That’s all I know.”

spoke so softly that she had to put her ear next to his mouth to hear and when he was quiet she whispered.

“Why did you do it?”

Again he moved his lips, “Forgive me Lisbeth! I had to do it. The Fräulein–”

She looked at him, startled by the hot look in his eyes, and her tongue suddenly cried out the thought almost before her brain could even think it.

“You, you love her?”

Then he raised his head the width of a thumb and murmured with closed eyes, “Yes, yes– I –love driving–with her.”

Those were the last words he spoke. He sank back into a deep faint and lay like that until the early morning when he passed away. Frau Lisbeth stood up. She ran to the door and old Froitsheim took her into his arms.

“My husband is dead,” she said.

The coachman made the sign of the cross and made to go past her into the room but she held him back.

“Where is the Fräulein?” she asked quickly. “It she alive? Is she hurt?”

The deep wrinkles in the old face deepened, “Is she alive?–Whether she even lives! She’s standing over there! Wounded? Not a scratch. She just got a little dirty!”

He pointed with trembling fingers out into the courtyard. There stood the slender Fräulein in her boy’s suit, setting her foot into the laced fingers of a Hussar, swinging up into the saddle.

“She telephoned the cavalry captain,” said the old coachman. “Told him she had no groom this morning, so the count sent that fellow over.”

Lisbeth ran across the courtyard.

“He is dead!” she cried. “My man is dead.”

Alraune ten Brinken turned around in the saddle, toyed with the riding whip.

“Dead,” she said slowly. “Dead. That’s really too bad.”

She lightly struck her horse and walked it up to the gate.

“Fräulein,” screamed Frau Lisbeth. “Fräulein, Fräulein–”

Frau Lisbeth ran to the Privy Councilor overflowing with all her despair and hatred. The Privy Councilor let her talk until she quieted down. Then he said that he understood her pain and was not offended at what she had said. He was also prepared, despite the notice, to pay three months of her husband’s wages. But she needed to be reasonable, should be able to see that her husband alone carried the blame for the regrettable accident.

She ran to the police and they were not even polite to her. They had seen it coming, they said. Everyone knew that Raspe was the wildest driver on the entire Rhine. They had done their duty many times by trying to warn him. She should be ashamed of herself for trying to lay the blame on the young Fräulein! Had she ever been seen driving? Yesterday or ever?

Then she ran to an attorney, then a second and a third. But they were honest people and told her that they could not move forward with a lawsuit even when she wanted to pay in advance. Oh, certainly, anything was possible and conceivable, why not? But did she have any proof? No, none at all. Well then! She should just go quietly back home. There was nothing that she could do. Even if everything that she said was true and could be proved–her husband would still carry the blame. He was a grown man, a skilled and experienced chauffeur, while the Fräulein was an inexperienced scarcely grown thing–

So she went back home. She buried her husband in the little cemetery behind the church. She packed all her things and loaded them onto the cart herself. She took the money the Privy Councilor had given her, took her boys and left.

A couple of days later a new chauffeur moved into her old living quarters. He was short, fat and drank a lot. Fräulein ten Brinken didn't like him and seldom went driving alone with him. He never got any speeding tickets and the people said that he was a good driver, much better than wild Raspe had been.

"Little moth," said Alraune ten Brinken when Wolf Gontram stepped into the room one evening.

The beautiful eyes of the youth glowed.

"You are the candle flame," he said.

Then she spoke, "You will burn your beautiful wings and then you will lie on the floor like an ugly worm. Be careful Wolf Gontram."

He looked at her and shook his head.

“No,” he said. “This is the way I want it.”

And every long evening he flew around the flame. Two others flew around it as well and got burned. Karl Mohnen was one and the other was Hans Geroldingen. It was a matter of honor for Dr. Mohnen to court her.

“A perfect match,” he thought. “Finally, she is the right one!”

And his little ship rushed in with full sails. He was always a little in love with every woman but now his brain burned under his bald head, making him foolish, letting him feel for this one girl everything that he had felt for dozens of other women one after the other back through the years. Like always he made the assumption that Alraune ten Brinken felt the same the same ardent desire toward him, a love that was boundless, limitless and breathless.

One day he talked to Wolf Gontram about his great new conquest. He was glad the boy rode out to Lendenich–as his messenger of love. He had the boy bring many greetings, hand kisses and small gifts from him. Not just one red rose, that was for gentlemen. He was both lover and beloved and needed to send more, flowers, chocolates, petit fours, pralines, and fans, hundreds of little things and knick-knacks. The small bit of good taste that he did have and which he had so successfully taught to his ward melted in the blink of an eye in the flickering fire of his love.

The cavalry captain would often go traveling with him. They had been friends for many years. Count Geroldingen had once been nurtured by Dr. Mohnen’s treasures of wisdom just as Wolf Gontram was now being nurtured. Dr. Mohnen had a vast storehouse and gave it out by the handfuls, happy to find someone that would make use of it.

The two of them would go off on adventures together. It was always the doctor that met the ladies and made their acquaintance. Later he would introduce the count as his friend and boast about him. Often enough it was the Hussar officer who finally plucked the ripe cherries from the tree which Karl Mohnen had discovered.

The first time he had pangs of conscience and considered himself as low as they came. He tormented himself for a couple of days and then openly confessed to his friend what he had done. He made vehement excuses saying the girl had made such advances toward him that he had no choice but to submit to her. He was glad that it had happened because now he knew the girl was not worthy of his friend's love.

Dr. Mohnen made nothing about it, saying that it didn't matter to him at all, that it was completely all right. Then he gave the example of the Mayan Indians in the Yucatan. It was customary for them to say, "My wife is also my friend's wife".

But Count Geroldingen could tell his friend was sick about it so the next time a new acquaintance of the doctor preferred him, he didn't say anything. Thus it happened over the years that quite a few of Dr. Mohnen's women also became the handsome cavalry captain's women as well, exactly like in the Yucatan. Only there was this difference, most of them had never been the doctor's women at all.

He was the chicari, the beater, that tracked down the game and drove it out into the open–but the hunter was Hans Geroldingen. Yet he was quiet about it, had a good heart and didn't want to hurt his friend's feelings. So the beater never noticed when the hunter shot and held himself up as the most glorious Nimrod on the Rhine.

Dr. Mohnen would often say, "Come along count. I've made a new conquest, a picture beautiful English girl. I picked her up yesterday at the open air concert and am meeting her tonight on the banks of the Rhine."

"But what about Elly?" the cavalry captain would reply.

"Replaced," declared Karl Mohnen grandly.

It was phenomenal how easily he could exchange his current flame for a new one. As soon as he found someone new he was simply done with the old one and didn't care about her at all. The girls never made any troubles for him either. In that respect he far surpassed the Hussar who always had difficulty letting go and even more difficulty in getting his women to let go

of him. For those reasons it required all the energy and persuasive skill of the doctor to take him along to meet some new beauty.

This time he said, “You must see her captain. God, I’m so happy that I have come so lightly through all my adventures and never been caught. Finally I’ve found the right one! She’s enormously rich, enormously. His old Excellency has over thirty million, perhaps forty. Well, what do you say count? His foster daughter is pretty as a picture and fresh as a blossom on a tree limb! By the way, speaking in strict confidence, the little bird is already in my net. I have never been so certain of things!”

“Yes, but what about Fräulein Clara?” returned the cavalry captain.

“Gone,” declared the doctor. “Just today I wrote her a letter saying that my work load had become so overwhelming that I simply had no more time left for her.”

Geroldingen sighed; Fräulein Clara was a teacher in an English finishing school. Dr. Mohnen had met her at a local dance and later introduced him to her. She loved the cavalry captain and he had hoped that for once Dr. Mohnen would take her away from him. He had to start thinking seriously about getting married. Sooner or later it had to happen, his debts were growing and he needed to find some solution.

“Write her the same thing!” cried Karl Mohnen. “God, if I can do it, you can do it as well. You’re just her friend! You have too much conscience man, much too much conscience.”

He wanted to take the count with him to Lendenich, to give him a reason for visiting with the little Fräulein ten Brinken.

He hit his friend lightly on the shoulder; “You’re as sentimental as a freshman, count! I leave one sitting and you blame yourself, always the same old song! But consider what stands to be won this time, the richest heiress on the Rhine. No delay is permitted!”

The cavalry captain rode out there with his friend and fell no less deeply in love with the strange creature who was so very different from all

the others that had offered their red lips for him to kiss. As he went back home that night he felt the same way he had that time twenty years ago when for the first time he had taken for himself the girl that his friend adored.

Over the years this had happened so often and he had been so successful at it that his conscience no longer bothered him. But he was ashamed of himself now. This time it was entirely different. His feelings toward this half child were different and he knew that his friend's emotions were different as well.

There was one thing that consoled him; Dr. Mohnen would certainly not win Fräulein ten Brinken. His chances of doing that were much less than they had been with any of the other women. Really, this time he was not even sure if she would be interested in him. When it came to this little doll all of his natural confidence had completely deserted him.

As far as young Gontram was concerned, it appeared that the Fräulein liked to have her handsome page, as she called him, around. But it was just as clear that he was nothing more than a plaything for Alraune without any will of his own.

No, neither of these two were rivals, not the smooth talking doctor nor the handsome youth. The cavalry captain seriously weighed his chances for the first time in his life. He was from an ancient and noble family and the King's Hussars were considered the finest regiment in the West.

He was slender and well built, still looked young enough and was soon to be promoted to Major. He was a dilettante, and versed well enough in all the arts. If he had to be honest with himself he would have to admit that it would not be easy to find a Prussian cavalry officer with more interests or more accomplishments than he had. Truthfully it was not surprising that both women and girls threw themselves around his neck. Why shouldn't Alraune do the same? She could search for a long time before she found anyone better. Even more, as the adopted daughter of his Excellency, she had the only thing that he couldn't offer, money, and she had it in such immense abundance! The two of them would make an excellent couple, he thought.

Wolf Gontram was in the house sacred to St. Nepomuk every evening and at least three times every week he brought the cavalry captain and the doctor along with him. The Privy Councilor withdrew after the meal, coming in only occasionally for a half hour at a time, listening to them, observing for a bit and withdrawing again, “testing the waters” as he called it.

The three lovers sat around the little Fräulein, looking at her and making love to her, each in their own way.

The young girl enjoyed the attention for awhile but then it began to bore her. Things were getting too monotonous and a little more color was needed to liven up the evenings in Lendenich.

“They should do something,” she said to Wolf Gontram.

The youth asked, “Who should do something?”

She looked at him, “Who? Those two! Dr. Mohnen and the count.”

“Tell them what they should do,” he replied. “I’m sure they will do it.”

Alraune looked at him astonished, “How should I know what they should do? They have to figure that out themselves.”

She put her head in her hands and stared out into the room.

“Wouldn’t it be nice Wölfchen, if they dueled each other? Shot each other dead–both of them?”

Wolf Gontram opined, “Why should they shoot each other dead? They are best friends.”

“You are a stupid boy, Wölfchen!” said Alraune. “What does that have to do with it? Whether they are best friends or not? Then they must become enemies.”

“Yes, but why? There is no purpose to it.”

She laughed, grabbed his curly head and kissed him quickly right on the nose.

“No, Wölfchen. There is no purpose at all–Why should there be? But it would be something different, would be a change–Will you help me Wölfchen?”

He didn’t answer. She asked again, “Will you help me Wölfchen?”

He nodded.

That evening Alraune deliberated with young Gontram on how they could arrange things to incite the two friends so that one of them would challenge the other to a duel. Alraune considered, spinning one plan after another and proposing it. Wölfchen Gontram listened and nodded but was still hesitant.

Alraune calmed him.

“They don’t need to be serious about it. Very little blood is shed at duels and afterward they will be like brothers again. It will strengthen their friendship!”

That brightened him up and he helped her think things through. He explained to her the various little weaknesses of them both, where the one was sensitive and where the other–

So her little plan grew. It was no finely crafted scheme at all, was much more quite childish and naïve. Only two people that were blindly in love would ever stumble over such a crude stone.

His Excellency noticed that something was up. He questioned Alraune and when she wouldn’t talk he questioned young Gontram. He learned everything he wanted to from the boy, laughed and gave him a few beautiful suggestions for the little plan as well.

But the friendship between the two was stronger than Alraune had believed. Dr. Mohnen was so rock solidly convinced of his own irresistible

nature that it took her over four weeks to turn things around and bring him to the impression that the captain might just take the field this time and likewise to give the captain the impression that for once the doctor might just triumph over him.

The count and Karl Mohnen both thought that it was time to speak privately with each other and settle things but Fräulein ten Brinken understood such confidential talks and always found ways to hinder them. One evening she would invite the doctor and not the cavalry captain. Next time she would go riding with the count and leave the doctor waiting for her at some garden concert.

Each considered themselves as her favorite but also had to recognize that her behavior toward the other was not entirely indifferent either. It was the old Privy Councilor himself that finally fanned the glowing spark into high flames.

He took his office manager to one side and had a long talk with him, said that he was very satisfied with his performance and would not be unhappy at all to see someone as dedicated as he was to someday become his successor. Really, he would never try to influence the decision of his child. Still, he wanted to warn him that there was someone, whom he did not want to name, that was fighting against him, in particular all kinds of rumors of his loose living were spreading and reaching the Fräulein’s ear.

His Excellency then had almost the same talk with the cavalry captain, except that in this case he remarked that he would not take it unkindly if his daughter married into such a prestigious old family like the Geroldingen’s.

During the next few weeks the two rivals strongly avoided any encounters with each other while doubling their attentions toward Alraune. Dr. Mohnen, especially, let none of her desires go unfulfilled. When he heard that she craved a charming seven-stranded pearl necklace that she had seen at a jeweler’s on Schilder Street in Cologne he immediately went there and bought it. Then when he saw that for a moment the Fräulein was really delighted over his gift he believed he had most certainly found the way to her heart and began to shower her with all kinds of beautiful jewels.

For this purpose he had to help himself to the money in the cash box at the ten Brinken offices. But he was so sure of his cause that he did it with a light heart and considered the little forced borrowing as something he was entitled to that he would immediately replace as soon as he received the dowry of millions from his father-in-law. He was certain that his Excellency would only laugh over his little trick.

His Excellency did laugh–but a little differently than the good doctor had thought. On the very same day that Alraune received the strands of pearls he rode into the city and determined immediately where the suitor had found the means for purchasing the gift. But he didn't say a word.

Count Geroldingen could give no pearls. There was no cash box for him to plunder and no jeweler would loan him anything on credit. But he wrote sonnets for the Fräulein that were really very beautiful! He painted her in her boy's clothing and played violin, not Beethoven whom he loved, but Offenbach, whom she liked to listen to.

Then on the birthday of the Privy Councilor the collision finally came. They had both been invited and the Fräulein had privately asked each one to escort her to the table. They both came up to her when the servant announced that dinner was served. Each considered the intrusion of the other as tactless and each said–and half suppressed–a few words.

Alraune waved Wolf Gontram over.

"If the gentlemen can't agree–" she said, laughing and took his arm.

It was a little quiet at the table at first. The Privy Councilor had to do most of the talking. But soon both lovers were warm. They drank to the health of the birthday child and his charming daughter. Karl Mohnen gave a speech and the Fräulein threw a couple of glances at him that made the hot blood pound in the cavalry captain's temples. But later, at dessert she laid her little hand lightly on the count's arm–only a second–but long enough to make the round fish eyes of the doctor pop out of his head. When she stood up she allowed both to lead her away; she danced with them both as well.

Then later while dancing a waltz separately with one she spoke of the other, ‘Oh, that was so abominable of your friend! You won’t really permit that will you?”

The count answered, “Certainly not!”

But Dr. Mohnen threw out his chest and declared, “You can count on me!”

The next morning the little dispute appeared no less childish to the count than it did to the doctor–but they both had the uneasy feeling that they had promised something to Fräulein ten Brinken.

“I will challenge him to a duel with pistols,” said Karl Mohnen to himself, never believing that it would ever happen.

But in any case that morning the cavalry captain sent a couple of comrades to his friend–he wanted the court of honor to see what they made of it. Dr. Mohnen negotiated with the gentlemen, explaining to them that the count was his closest friend and that he didn’t wish to harm him at all. The count only needed to apologize to him–then everything would be fine. He wanted to tell them in confidence that he would also pay off all his friend’s debts immediately on the day after the wedding.

But the officers declared that while all that was very nice it had nothing at all to do with them. The cavalry captain felt insulted and demanded satisfaction. Their task was only to ask if he were gentleman enough to accept the challenge, an exchange of three shots at a distance of fifteen paces.

Dr. Mohnen started, “Three–three exchanges.” he stammered.

The Hussar officers laughed, “Now calm yourself Herr Doctor! The Court of Honor would never in their lives allow such an insane challenge for such a small offence. It is only in good form.”

Dr. Mohnen could see that. He counted on the healthy common sense of the gentlemen of the Court of Honor as well and accepted the challenge.

He did more than that, ran at once to his fraternity house with it and requested seconds, then he sent two students in haste to challenge the Captain for his side–five bullet exchanges at ten paces is what he demanded. That would make him look good and most certainly impress the little Fräulein.

The mixed Court of Honor, composed of officers and fraternity members, were reasonable enough and settled on a single exchange of bullets at twenty paces. That couldn't do much mischief and honor would be served.

Hans Geroldingen smiled as he heard the verdict and bowed in agreement. But Dr. Mohnen turned very pale. He had calculated that they would declare the duel unnecessary and demand each side to apologize to the other. It was only one bullet but it could still strike!

Early the next morning they solemnly traveled out into Kotten forest in civilian clothes. There were seven carriages, three Hussar officers and the regiment doctor, then Dr. Mohnen and with him Wolf Gontram, two Saxonia fraternity brothers, one from the Phalia fraternity for the impartial guest official who was acting as umpire, one for Dr. Peerenbohm, the fraternity doctor, an old gentleman from the hills, along with carriages for the fraternity seconds and the two officer seconds as well as an assistant for the regimental doctor.

His Excellency ten Brinken was there as well. He had offered his medical help to his office manager, then searched out his old medical case and had everything polished up like new.

For two hours they rode through the laughing dawn. Count Geroldingen was in a very good mood. He had received a little letter from Lendenich the evening before. There was a four-leaf clover inside and a slip of paper with one word on it, "Mascot". He put the letter in his lower left vest pocket. It made him laugh and dream of all kinds of good things.

He chatted with his comrades, make jokes about the childish duel. He was the best pistol shot in the city and joked that he would like to shoot a button off the doctor's coat sleeve. But you could never be sure of these

things, especially with a strange pistol. It would be much better to just shoot into the air. It would be a mean trick if the good doctor got so much as even a scratch.

But Dr. Mohnen, who sat together in the carriage with the Privy Councilor and young Gontram, said nothing at all. He had also received a small letter that carried the large slanting letters of Fräulein ten Brinken. It contained a dainty golden horseshoe. But he never once really looked at his mascot, only murmured something about childish superstition and threw the letter on his writing desk.

He was afraid, truly and horribly afraid. It poured itself like dirty mop water over the short-lived enthusiasm of his love. He chided himself for being a complete idiot. Getting up this early in the morning only to go riding out to the slaughter. He had a hot burning desire to apologize to the cavalry captain and be done with it. This feeling battled inside him against the feeling of shame that he would feel in front of the Privy Councilor and perhaps even more in front of Wolf who had believed all his tales of heroic deeds.

Meanwhile he gave himself a heroic appearance, attempted to smoke a cigarette and look around calmly. But he was white as chalk when the carriage stopped in the woods and they set off down a narrow footpath to a broad clearing.

The doctors prepared their medical instruments. The umpire opened the pistol case and loaded the murderous weapons. He carefully weighed the powder so that both rounds were equally powerful. They were beautiful weapons that belonged to the umpire.

The seconds chose for their clients, drew straws–short looses, long wins. The cavalry captain smiled at all the solemnity, which no one was really taking seriously. But Dr. Mohnen turned away and stared at the ground. Then the umpire stepped out twenty paces taking such immense leaps that the officers looked with disapproving faces. It did not seem right to them that the umpire was making a farce of it and that proper decorum meant so little.

“The clearing is too small!” Major Von der Osten cried out sarcastically to him.

But the tall umpire answered calmly, “Then the gentlemen can stand in the woods. That would be even better.”

The seconds led the principals to their places. The umpire once more challenged them to reconcile, but didn’t even wait for an answer.

“Since a reconciliation is refused by both sides,” he continued, I ask the gentlemen to wait on my command–”

A deep sigh from the doctor interrupted him. Karl Mohnen stood there with trembling knees, the pistol fell out of his shaking hand, his face was as pale as a shroud.

“One moment,” cried the fraternity doctor across to the other side as he hurried with long strides up to him. The Privy Councilor, Wolf Gontram, and both gentlemen from Saxonia followed.

“What’s wrong?” asked Dr. Peerenbohm.

Dr. Mohnen gave no answer; he was completely undone and simply stared straight ahead.

“Now what’s wrong with you doctor?” repeated his second, taking the pistol up from the ground and pressing it back into his hand.

But Karl Mohnen remained quiet. He looked as if he were drunk. Then a smile slid over the broad face of the Privy Councilor. He stepped up to one of the Saxons and whispered into his ear:

“He had an accident.”

The fraternity brother didn’t understand him right away.

“What do you mean, your Excellency?” he asked.

“Can’t you smell!” whispered the old man.

The Saxons gave a quick laugh but kept the seriousness of the situation. They only took out their handkerchiefs and pressed them over their noses.

“Incontinentia alvi,” declared Dr. Peerenbohm appreciatively.

He took a little flask out of his vest pocket, put a couple drops of tincture of opium on a lump of sugar and handed it to Dr. Mohnen.

“Here, chew on this,” he said and pressed it into the doctor’s mouth. “Now pull yourself together. Seriously–a duel is a very frightening thing!”

But the poor doctor heard nothing, saw nothing, and did not notice the bitter taste of opium on his tongue. He confusedly sensed that the people were leaving him.

Then he heard the loud voice of the umpire, “One.”

It rang in his ears–Then “Two,”–at the same time he heard a shot. He closed his eyes, his teeth chattered, his head was spinning.

“Three.”

It sounded from the edge of the woods. Then his own pistol went off and the loud explosion so close stunned him so that his legs gave way. He didn’t fall, he collapsed like a dead pig, broadly setting down on the dew fresh ground.

He sat like that for a minute, although it seemed like an hour. Then it occurred to him that it was over.

“It’s over,” he murmured with a happy sigh.

He felt himself all over–no, he wasn’t wounded. Only, only his trousers were ruined. But what was going on? Nobody was paying any attention to him, so he got up by himself, amazed at the immense speed with which his vitality returned to him.

With deep gulps he drank in the morning air. Oh how good it was to be alive!

Over at the other end of the clearing he saw a tight cluster of people standing together. He polished his Pince-nez and looked through it. Everyone had their back turned toward him. He slowly started across, recognized Wolf Gontram who was standing a long way back. Then he saw two kneeling and someone lying down in the middle. Was it the cavalry captain? Could he have been shot? Had he even fired?

He made a little detour through the high fir trees, came out closer and could now see perfectly. He saw how the count caught sight of him, saw how he weakly beckoned with his hand. They all made room for him as he stepped into the circle. Hans Geroldingen stretched his right hand out to him. He kneeled down and grasped it.

“Forgive me,” he murmured. I didn’t really want to–”

The cavalry captain smiled, “I know, old friend. It was a coincidence. A God damned coincidence!”

Just then a sudden pain seized him; he moaned and groaned miserably.

“I just wanted to tell you doctor, that I’m not angry at you,” he continued weakly.

Dr. Mohnen didn’t answer; a violent twitch went around the corners of his mouth. His eyes filled with tears. Then the doctors pulled him to the side and occupied themselves once more with the wounded man.

“Nothing can be done,” whispered the regimental doctor.

“We must try getting him to the clinic as quickly as possible,” said the Privy Councilor.

“It would not do us any good,” replied Dr. Peerenbohn. “He would die on us during the transport and only give him unnecessary misery and pain.”

The bullet was in the abdomen; it had penetrated through all the intestines and impacted against the spine where it was now lodged. It was as if it had been drawn there by a mysterious force, straight through Alraune's letter, through the four-leaf clover and the beloved word, "Mascot".

It was the little attorney Manasse that saved Dr. Mohnen. When Legal Councilor Gontram showed him the letter he had just received from Lendenich, he declared that the Privy Councilor was the most base, low down, scoundrel that he had ever known. He implored his colleague to not deliver the letter to the District Attorney's office until the doctor was safe.

It was not about the duel–The authorities had begun proceedings for that on the same day. No, it was about the embezzlement at his Excellency's office. The attorney himself ran to the delinquent and hauled him out of bed.

"Get up!" he snapped. "Dress! Pack your suitcase! Take the next train to Antwerp and board a ship as quickly as possible! You are an ass! You are a camel! How could you do such a stupid thing?"

Dr. Mohnen rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. He couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. The way he stood with the Privy Councilor–

But Herr Manasse didn't let him finish.

"How you stand with him?" he barked. "Yes, you stand just splendidly with him! Magnificent! Unsurpassed! You fool–It is his Excellency himself that has ordered the Legal Councilor to go to the District Attorney's office because you have stolen money out of his cash box!"

At that Karl Mohnen decided to crawl out of bed. It was Stanislaus Schacht, his old friend, that helped him get away. He studied the departure schedules, gave him the money that was needed and hired the taxi that would take him to Cologne.

It was a sad parting. Karl Mohnen had lived for over thirty years in this city. Every house, almost every stone held a memory for him. His roots

were here; here alone his life had meaning. Now he was thrust forth, head over heels, out into some strange–

“Write me,” said fat Schacht. “What will you do?”

Karl Mohnen hesitated, everything appeared utterly destroyed, collapsed and in pieces. His life had become a confused rubbish pile.

He shrugged his shoulders; his good-natured eyes had a forlorn look.

“I don’t know,” he murmured.

But then the old habit crept across his lips and he smiled through his tears.

“I will find a wife,” he said. “There are many rich girls over there–in America.”

Chapter Ten

Describes how Wolf Gontram was put into the ground because of Alraune.

KARL Mohnen was not the only one around that time that fell under the deceptive wheels of his Excellency’s magnificent machine. The Privy Councilor completely took over the large People’s Mortgage Bank, which had been under his influence for a long time. At the same time he took possession and control over the wide many-branched Silver Frost Association that had their little savings banks in every little village under the flag of the church.

That didn’t happen without sharp friction since many of the old employees that had thought their positions permanent were reluctant to cooperate with the new regime.

Attorney Manasse, together with Legal Councilor Gontram, legal advisor for these transactions, acted in as many ways as possible to soften the transition without hindering it. His Excellency’s lack of regard made things severe enough and everything that did not appear absolutely necessary to him was thrown away out of hand without further thought. Using right dubious means he pushed to the side other little district associations and banks that opposed him and refused to submit to his control.

By now his superior might extended far into the industrial district as well–everything that had to do with the earth–coal, metals, mineral water, water works, real estate, buildings, agriculture, road making, dams, canals–everything in the Rhineland more or less depended on him.

Since Alraune had come back into the house he handled things with fewer scruples than ever. From the time he first became aware of her influence on his success he showed no more regard to others, no restraint or consideration.

In long pages in the leather volume he explains all of these affairs. Evidently it gave him joy to speak of each new undertaking that was of little value with almost no possibility of success–it was only of these things that he would grab up–and finally attribute their success to the creature that lived in his house.

From time to time he would solicit advice from her without entrusting her with the particulars, asking only, “Should I do it?”

If she nodded, he did it and would drop it immediately if she shook her head. The law had not appeared to exist anymore to the old man for a long time now. Earlier he had spent long hours talking things over with his attorneys, trying to find a way out, a loophole or twist of phrase that would give him a back door. He had all possible gaps in the law books studied, knew all kinds of tricks and whistles that made outright evil deeds legally acceptable. It had been a long time now since he had troubled himself with such evasions.

Trusting only on his power and his luck he broke the law many times knowing full well that no judge would stand up with the plaintiff to balance the scales. His lawsuits multiplied as well as complaints against him. Most were anonymous, including those the authorities themselves entered against him.

But his connections extended as far into the government as they did the church. He was on close terms with them both. His voice in the provincial daily papers was decisive. The policies of the ArchBishop’s palace in Cologne, which he supported, gave him even greater backing. His influence went as far as Berlin where an exceptionally meritorious medal was given to him at an unveiling of a monument dedicated to the Kaiser. The hand of the All Highest himself placed the medal around his neck and was documented publicly.

Really, he had steered a good sum of money into the building of the monument–but the city had paid dearly for the real estate on which it stood when they were required to purchase it from him.

In addition to these were his title, his venerable age, his acknowledged services to the sciences. What little public prosecutor would want to press charges against him? A few times the Privy Councilor himself pressed charges at some of these accusations. They were seen as gross exaggerations and collapsed like soap bubbles.

In this way he nourished the skepticism of the authorities toward his accusers. It went so far that in one case when a young assistant judge was thoroughly convinced, clear as day, against his Excellency and wanted to intervene, the District Attorney without even looking at the records declared:

“Stupid stuff! Grumblers screaming–We know that! It would only make us look like fools.”

In this case the grumbler was the provisional director of the Wiesbaden Land Museum which had purchased all manner of artifacts from the Privy Councilor. Now he felt defrauded and wanted to publicly declaim him as a forger of antiquities.

The authorities didn’t take up the case but they did notify the Privy Councilor who defended himself very well. He wrote his own personal publication that was inserted into a special Sunday edition of the “Cologne News”. The beautiful human-interest story carried the title, “Taking care of our Museums”.

He didn’t go on about any of the accusations against him, but he attacked his opponent viciously, destroyed him completely, placing him as a know nothing and cretin. He didn’t stop until the poor scholar lay unmoving on the floor. Then he pulled his strings, let his wheels turn–after less than a month there was a different director in the museum.

The head district attorney nodded in satisfaction when he read the notice in the paper.

He brought the page over to the assistant judge and said, “Read that, colleague! You can thank God that you asked me about it and avoided such a fatal error.”

The assistant judge thanked him, but was not absolutely convinced.

In early February on Candlemass all the sleighs and autos traveled to “The Gathering”. It was the great Shrovetide Ball of the community. The Royalty was there and around them circled anyone in the city that wore uniforms or colored fraternity armbands and caps.

Professors circled there as well, along with those from the court, the government, city officials, rich people, Councilors to the Chamber of Commerce and wealthy industrialists.

Everyone was in costume. Only the declared chaperones were allowed to dress as false Spaniards. The old gentleman himself had to leave his dress suit at home and come in a black hooded robe and cowl. Legal Councilor Gontram presided at his Excellency’s large table. He knew the old wine cellar and understood it, the best vintages and how to procure them.

Princess Wolkonski sat there with her daughter Olga, now Countess Figueirea y Abrantes, and with Frieda Gontram. Both were visiting her for the winter.

Then there was Attorney Manasse, a couple of private university speakers, professors and even a few officers and of course the Privy Counselor himself who had taken his little daughter out for her first ball.

Alraune came dressed as Mademoiselle de Maupin wearing boy’s clothes in the style of Beardsly’s famous illustrations. She had torn through many wardrobes in the house of ten Brinken, stormed through many old chests and trunks. She finally found them in a damp cellar along with piles of beautiful Mechlin lace that an ancient predecessor had placed there. It is certain the poor seamstress who created them would have cried tears to see them treated like that.

This lacey women's clothing that made up Alraune's cheeky costume netted still more fresh tears–she scolded the dressmaker that could not get just the right fit to the capricious costume, the hair dresser that Alraune beat because she couldn't understand the exact hair style Alraune wanted and who couldn't lay the chi-chi's just right, and the little maid whom she impatiently poked with a large pin while getting dressed.

Oh, it was a torture to turn Alraune into this girl of Gautier's, in the bizarre interpretation of the Englishman, Beardsly.

But when it was done, when the moody boy with his high sword-cane strutted with graceful pomp through the hall there were no eyes that didn't greedily follow him, no old ones or young ones, of either men or women.

The Chevalier de Maupin shared his glory with Rosalinde. Rosalinde, the one in the last scene–was Wolf Gontram, and never did the stage see a more beautiful one. Not in Shakespeare's time when slender boys played the roles of his women. Not even later since Margaret Hews, the beloved of Prince Rupert, was the first woman to play the part of the beautiful maiden in "As You Like It".

Alraune had the youth dressed and with infinite care had brought him up to this point. She taught him how to walk, how to dance, how to move his fan and even how he should smile.

And now, even as she appeared as a boy and yet a girl kissed by Hermes as well as Aphrodite in her Beardsly costume; Wolf Gontram embodied the character of his compatriot, Shakespeare, no less.

He was in a red evening gown and train brocaded with gold, a beautiful girl, and yet a boy as well. Perhaps the old Privy Councilor understood all of it, perhaps little Manasse, perhaps even Frieda Gontram did a little as her quick look darted from one to the other. Other than that it was certain that no one else did in that immense hall of the Gathering in which heavy garlands of red roses hung from the ceiling.

But everyone felt it, felt that here was something special, of singular worth. Her Royal Highness sent her adjutant to fetch them both and present

them to her. She danced the first waltz with him, playing the gentleman to Rosalinde, then as the lady with the Chevalier de Maupin. She clapped her hands loudly during the minuet when Théophile Gautier's curly headed boy bowed and flirted with Shakespeare's sweet dream girl directly in front of her.

Her Royal Highness was an excellent dancer herself, was first at the tennis courts and the best ice skater in the city. She would have loved to dance through the entire night with only the two of them. But the crowd wanted their share as well. So Mademoiselle de Maupin and Rosalinde flew from one set of arms into another, soon pressing into the muscular arms of young men, soon feeling the hot heaving breasts of beautiful women.

Legal Councilor Gontram looked on indifferently. The Treves punch bowl and its brewed contents interested him much more than the success of his son. He attempted to tell Princess Wolkonski a long story about a counterfeiter but her Highness wasn't listening.

She shared the satisfaction and happy pride of his Excellency ten Brinken. Felt herself a participant in the creation and bringing into the world of this creature, her Godchild, Alraune.

Only little Manasse was bad tempered enough, cursing and muttering under his breath.

"You shouldn't dance so much boy," he hissed at Wolf. "Be more careful of your lungs!"

But young Gontram didn't hear him.

Countess Olga sprang up and flew out to Alraune.

"My handsome chevalier," she whispered.

The boy dressed in lace answered, "Come here my little Tosca!"

He wheeled her around to the left and circled through the hall, scarcely giving her time to breathe, brought her back to the table breathless and

kissed her full on the mouth.

Frieda Gontram danced with her brother, looking at him for a long time with her intelligent gray eyes.

“It’s a shame that you are my brother,” she said.

He didn’t understand her at all.

“Why?” he asked.

She laughed, “Oh, you stupid boy! By the way, your answer ‘Why?’ is entirely correct. It shouldn’t make any difference at all should it? It is only the last shred of those morals that our stupid education has given us. Like putting lead weights in our virtuous skirts to keep them long, stretched smooth and modest. That’s what it is, my beautiful little brother!”

But Wolf Gontram didn’t understand one syllable. She laughed, left him standing there, and took the arm of Fräulein ten Brinken.

“My brother is a more beautiful girl that you are,” she said. “But you are a sweeter boy.”

“And you,” laughed Alraune, “my blonde abbess, you prefer sweet boys?”

She answered, “What is permitted for Héloise? It went very badly for my poor Abalard, you know. He was slender and delicate just like you are! There I can learn much about self-modesty.

But you, my sweet little boy, you appear like a strange priest with a new and fresh doctrine. One that would harm no one.”

“My doctrine is ancient and venerable,” said the Chevalier de Maupin.

“That is the best covering for such sweet sin,” laughed the blonde abbess.

She took a goblet from the table and handed it to him.

“Drink, sweet boy.”

The countess came up with hot pleading eyes, “Let me have him!”

But Frieda Gontram shook her head. “No,” she said sharply. “Not him! Fair game, if you like–”

“She kissed me,” insisted Tosca and Héloise scoffed.

“Do you believe you are the only one tonight?”

She turned to Alraune, “Decide, my Paris. Who shall it be? The worldly Lady or the pious one?”

“For today?” asked Fräulein de Maupin.

“Today–and as long as you want!” cried Countess Olga.

The fancy dressed boy laughed, “I want the abbess–and Tosca as well.”

He ran laughing over to a blonde Teuton that was strutting as a red executioner with a mighty axe made of cardboard.

“You–brother-in-law,” she cried. “I’ve got two mama’s. Will you execute them, both of them?”

The student straightened up and raised both arms high.

“Where are they?” he bellowed.

But Alraune found no time to answer; the Colonel of the 28th regiment had snatched her up for the two-step.

–The Chevalier de Maupin stepped onto the professors’ table.

“Where is your Albert?” asked the professor of literature. “Where is your Isabella?”

“My Albert is running around here somewhere, Herr Professor,” answered Alraune. He appears in two dozen different versions in this very ballroom!”

“As for Isabella–her eyes searched around the room–Isabella,” she continued, I will present her to you as well.”

She stepped up to the professor’s daughter; a fifteen year old, timid thing that looked at her with large amazed blue eyes.

“Will you be my page, little gardener?” she asked.

The flaxen haired girl said, “Yes, gladly–If you want me to!”

“You must be my page when I am a lady,” the Chevalier instructed, “and my maid when I go as a gentleman.”

The little girl nodded.

“How is that, Herr Professor?” laughed Alraune.

“Summa cum Laude!” acknowledged the professor. “But leave my dear little Trudi here with me.”

“Now I ask!” cried the Fräulein ten Brinken and she turned to a short, round botanist.

“Which flowers bloom in my garden, Herr Professor?”

“Red hibiscus,” answered the botanist. He knew the flora of Ceylon very well, “golden lotus and white temple flowers.”

Wrong!” cried Alraune. “Entirely wrong! Do you know, Herr Rifleman from Harlem? Which flowers grow in my garden?”

The art professor looked at her sharply, a light smile tugged at his lips.

“Les fleurs du mal; the flowers of evil,” he said. “Aren’t they?”

“Yes,” cried Mlle. de Maupin. “Yes, you’ve got it right.”

“But they don’t bloom for you my dear scientist. You must patiently wait until they are dried and pressed into a book or in a frame after the varnish dries.”

She pulled her pretty sword, bowed, saluted and snapped her sword-cane back together. Then she turned around on her heel, danced a few steps with the Baron von Manteuffel from Prussia, heard the light voice of her Royal Highness and sprang quickly up to the table of the princess.

“Countess Almaviva,” she began. “What do you desire from your faithful cherubim?”

“I’m really disappointed with him,” said the princess. “He has really earned a beating! Scampering around the hall with one scoundrel after another.”

“Don’t forget the Susanna’s either,” laughed the prince-escort.

Alraune ten Brinken pulled her lips into a pout. “What should such a poor boy do,” she cried, “who knows nothing of this evil world?”

She laughed, took the lute from the shoulder of the adjutant who was standing in front of her dressed as Frans Hals. She strummed, stepped back a few paces and sang:

“ *You, who instinctively*

Know the ways of the heart

Tell me, is it love

That burns so here in mine?”

“From whom do you want advice cherubim?” asked the princess.

“Doesn’t my Countess Almaviva know?” Alraune gave back.

Her Royal Highness laughed, “You are very daring, my page!”

Cherubim answered, “That is the way of pages!”

He lifted the lace on the sleeves of the princess and kissed her on the hand–a little too high on the arm and a little too long.

“Shall I bring you Rosalinde?” he whispered, and he read the answer in her eyes.

Rosalinde danced past–not a moment’s rest was she allowed this evening.

The Chevalier de Maupin took her away from her dance partner, led her up the steps to the table of her Highness.

“Give her something to drink,” she cried. “My beloved thirsts.”

She took the glass the princess handed to her and placed it to Wolf Gontram’s red lips. Then she turned to the prince consort.

“Will you dance with me, wild outrider from the Rhine?

He laughed coarsely and pointed to his gigantic brown riding boots with their immense spurs.

“Do you believe that I can dance in these?”

“Try it,” she urged, and pulled him by the arm away from where he was sitting.

“It will be alright! Only don’t trample me to death or break me, you rough hunter.”

The prince threw a doubtful glance at the delicate thing in perfumed lace, then put on his buckskin gloves and reached out to her.

“Then come, my little page,” he cried.

Alraune threw a hand kiss over to the princess, waltzed through the hall with the heavy prince. The people made room for them and it went well enough diagonally across and then back. He raised her high and whirled her through the air so that she screamed. Then he got entangled in his long spurs–oops! They were both lying on the dance floor.

She was up again, like new, reaching out her hand to him.

“Get up Herr Outrider. I can’t very well lift you.”

He raised his upper body, but when he tried to get onto his right foot a quick “ouch!” came out of his mouth. He steadied himself with his left hand, tried to get up again, but it didn’t work. An intense pain took his Majesty across the foot.

There he sat, big and strong, in the middle of the dance floor and couldn’t get himself up. Several came up and tried taking off the mighty boot, which covered his entire leg, but it wouldn’t go. The foot had swelled up so quickly they had to cut away the tough leather with sharp knives. Professor Dr. Helban, Orthopedic, examined him and determined the anklebone was broken.

“I’m done with dancing for today,” grumbled the prince-escort.

Alraune stood at the front of the thick circle that surrounded him. Near her pressed the red executioner. A little song occurred to her that she had heard the students howling at night.

“Tell me,” she asked. “How does that song go? The one about the fields, the forests and the strong man’s strength?”

The tall Teuton was thoroughly drunk and reacted as if someone had thrown a coin into an automated machine. He swung his axe high into the air and bellowed out:

“ *He fell on a stone.*

He fell on a–crack, crack, crack –

He fell on a stone!

Broke three ribs in his body

In the fields and the forests

And all of his strength–

And then his righ –crack, crack, crack

And then his right leg!”

“Shut up!” whispered a fraternity brother to him. “Are you entirely crazy?”

That quieted him. But the good natured prince laughed.

“Thanks for the appropriate serenade! But you can save the three ribs– My leg here is completely enough!”

They carried him out on a chair, helped him into his sleigh. The princess left the ball with him. She was not at all happy about the incident.

Alraune sought out Wolf Gontram, found him still sitting at the abandoned Royal table.

“What did she do?” she asked quickly. “What did she say?”

“I don’t know,’ answered Wölfchen.

She took his fan, hit him sharply on the arm.

“You do know,” she insisted. “You must know and you must tell me!”

He shook his head, “But I really don’t know. She gave me something to drink and smoothed back the hair on my forehead. I believe she also squeezed my hand, but I can’t say exactly, don’t know exactly all that she said. A couple of times I said, ‘Yes.’ But I wasn’t listening to her at all. I was thinking about something entirely different.”

“You are terribly stupid Wölfchen,” said the Fräulein reproachfully. “You were dreaming again! What were you dreaming about this time?”

“About you,” he replied.

She stamped her feet in anger.

“About me! Always about me! Why are you always thinking about me?

His large deep eyes pleaded with her.

“I can’t help it,” he whispered.

The music began, interrupting the silence that the going away of the Royalty had caused. “Roses of the South” sounded soft and seductive. She took his hand, pulled him out with her.

“Come, Wölfchen, we will dance!”

They stepped out and turned around. They were alone in the large hall. The gray bearded art professor saw them, climbed up on his chair and shouted:

“Quiet! Special waltz for the Chevalier de Maupin and his Rosalinde.”

Hundreds of eyes rested on the beautiful couple. Alraune was highly aware of it and felt the admiration with every step that she took. But Wolf Gontram noticed nothing, he only felt, as he lay in her arms and was carried by the soft sounds. His heavy black eye lashes lowered, shadowing his deep, dreamy eyes.

The Chevalier de Maupin led, certain, as confidant as a slender page that has lived on the smooth dance floor since the cradle. His head was bowed slightly forward, his left hand held two of Rosalinde's fingers while the right rested on the golden knob of the sword-cane that he had pushed down through the lace trimmed sash till the other end showed behind him. His powdered hair curled like tiny silver snakes, a smile spread his lips revealing smooth white teeth.

Rosalinde followed every light pressure. Her red and gold train slid smoothly over the floor and her figure grew out of it like a graceful shaped flower. Her head lay back, white ostrich plumes dangled heavily from her large hat. She was worlds away from everyone else, enraptured by the garlands of roses that hung throughout the hall. They passed under them again and again on their way around the dance floor.

The guests pressed to the edges, those in back climbed up on chairs and tables. They watched, breathless.

"I congratulate you, your Excellency," murmured Princess Wolkonski.

The Privy Councilor replied, "Thank you, your Highness. You see that our efforts have not been entirely in vain."

They changed directions, the Chevalier led his Lady diagonally across the hall, and Rosalinde opened her eyes wide, throwing quiet, astonished glances at the crowd surrounding them.

"Shakespeare would kneel if he saw this Rosalinde," declared the professor of literature.

But at the next table little Manasse barked from his chair down to Legal Councilor Gontram.

"Stand up and look just this once, Herr Colleague! Look at that! Your boy looks just like your departed wife–exactly like her!"

The old Legal Councilor remained sitting quietly, sampling a new bottle of Urziger Auslese.

“I can’t especially remember any more how she looked, “ he opined indifferently.

Oh, he remembered her well, but what did that have to do with other people?

The couple danced, down through the hall and back. Rosalinde’s white shoulders rose and fell faster, her cheeks grew flushed–but the Chevalier smiled under his powder and remained equally graceful, equally certain, confident and nimble.

Countess Olga tore the red carnations out of her hair and threw them at the couple. The Chevalier de Maupin caught one in the air, pressed it to his lips and blew her a kiss. Then all the others grabbed after colorful flowers, taking them out of vases on the tables, tearing them from clothing, loosening them from their hair, and under a shower of flowers the couple waltzed to the left around the hall carried by the sounds of “Roses of the South”.

The orchestra started over and over again. The musicians, dulled and over tired from nightly playing, appeared to wake up, leaning over the balustrade of the balcony and looking down. The baton of the conductor flew faster, hotter rushed the bows of the violinists and in deep silence the untiring couple, Rosalinde and the Chevalier de Maupin, floated through a sea of roses, colors and sounds.

Then the conductor stopped the music. Then it broke loose. The Baron von Platten, Colonel of the 28th cried out with his stentorian voice down from the gallery:

“A cheer for the couple! A cheer for Fräulein ten Brinken! A cheer for Rosalinde!”

The glasses clinked and people shouted and yelled, pressing onto the dance floor, surrounding the couple, almost crushing them.

Two fraternity boys from Rhenania carried in a mighty basket full of red roses they had purchased downtown somewhere from a flower woman.

A couple Hussar officers brought champagne. Alraune only sipped, but Wolf Gontram–overheated, red-hot and thirsty, guzzled the cool drink greedily, one goblet after another.

Alraune pulled him away, breaking a path through the crowd. The red executioner sat in the middle of the hall. He stuck out his long neck, held out his axe to her with both hands.

“I have no flowers,” he cried. “I myself am a red rose. Pluck me!”

Alraune left him sitting, led her lady further, past the tables under the gallery and into the conservatory. She looked around her. It was no less full of people and all of them were waving and calling out to them. Then she saw a little door behind a heavy curtain that led out to a balcony.

“Oh, this is good!” she cried. “Come with Wölfchen!”

She pulled back the curtain, turned the key, and pressed down on the latch. But five coarse fingers rested on her arm.

“What do you want there?” cried a harsh voice.

She turned around. It was Attorney Manasse in his black hooded robe and mask.

“What do you want outside?” he repeated.

She shook off his ugly hand.

“What is it to you?” she answered. “We just want to get a breath of fresh air.”

He nodded vigorously, “That’s just what I thought! Exactly why I followed you over here. But you won’t do it, will not do it!”

Fräulein ten Brinken straightened up, looked at him haughtily.

“And why shouldn’t I do it? Perhaps you would like to stop us?”

He involuntarily sagged under her glance, but didn’t give up.

“Yes, I will stop you, I will! Don’t you understand that this is madness? You are both over heated, almost drenched in sweat–and you want to go out onto the balcony where it is twelve degrees below zero?”

“We are going,” insisted Alraune.

“Then go,” he barked. “It doesn’t matter to me what you do Fräulein–I will only stop the boy, Wolf Gontram, him alone.”

Alraune measured him from head to foot. She pulled the key out of the lock, opened the door wide.

“Well then,” she said.

She stepped outside onto the balcony, raised her hand and beckoned to her Rosalinde.

“Will you come out into the winter night with me?” she cried. “Or will you stay inside the hall?”

Wolf Gontram pushed the attorney to the side, stepped quickly through the door. Little Manasse grabbed at him, clamped tightly onto his arm. But the boy pushed him back again, silently, so that he fell awkwardly against the curtain.

“Don’t go Wolf!” screamed the attorney. “Don’t go!”

He looked wretched, his hoarse voice broke.

But Alraune laughed out loud, “Adieu, faithful Eckart! Stay pretty in there and guard our audience!”

She slammed the door in his face, stuck the key in the lock and turned it twice. The little attorney tried to see through the frosted window. He tore at the latch and in a rage stamped both feet on the floor. Then he slowly calmed himself, came out from behind the curtain and stepped back into the hall.

“So it is fate,” he growled.

He bit his strong, tangled teeth together, went back to his Excellency’s table, let himself fall heavily into a chair.

“What’s wrong, Herr Manasse?” asked Frieda Gontram. “You look like seven days of rainy weather!”

“Nothing,” he barked. “Absolutely nothing–by the way, your brother is an ass! Herr Colleague, don’t drink all of that alone! Save some of it for me!”

The Legal Councilor poured his glass full.

But Frieda Gontram said quite convinced, “Yes, I believe that too. He is an ass.”

The two walked through the snow, leaned over the balustrade, Rosalinde and the Chevalier de Maupin. The full moon fell over the wide street, threw its sweet light on the baroque shape of the university, then the old palace of the Archbishop. It played on the wide white expanses down below, throwing fantastic shadows diagonally over the sidewalk.

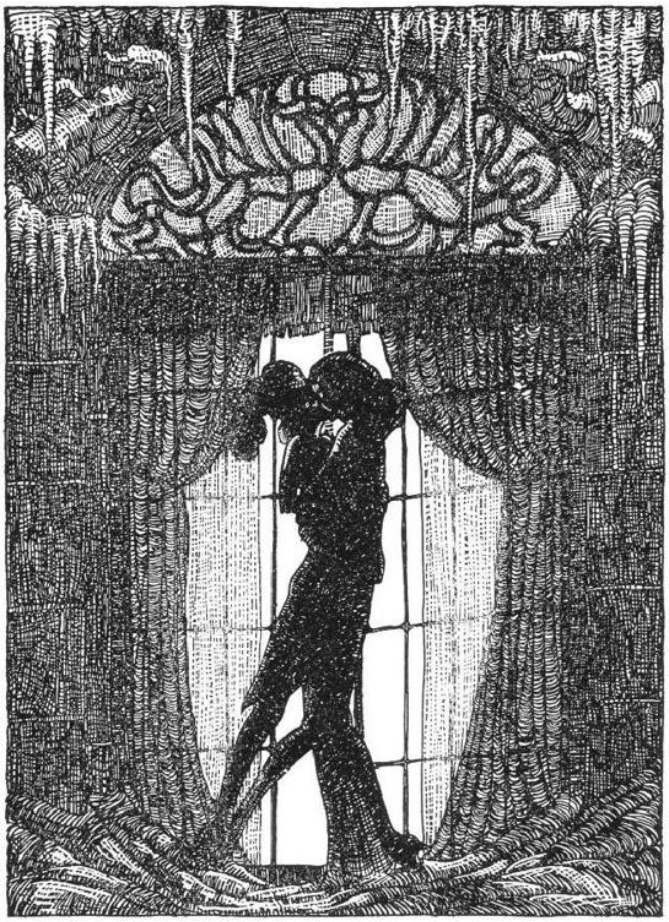
Wolf Gontram drank in the icy air.

“That is beautiful,” he whispered, waving with his hand down at the white street where there was not the slightest sound to disturb the deep silence.

But Alraune ten Brinken was looking at him, saw how his white shoulders glowed in the moonlight, saw his large deep eyes shining like opals.

“You are beautiful,” she said to him. “You are more beautiful than the moonlit night.”

He let go of the stone balustrade, reached out for her and embraced her.



“ Alraune,” he cried, “Alraune.”

“Alraune,” he cried. “Alraune.”

She endured this for a moment, then freed herself, and patted him lightly on the hand.

“No,” she laughed, “No! You are Rosalinde–and I am the boy, so I will court you.”

She looked around, grabbed a chair out of the corner, dragged it over, beat off the snow with her sword-cane.

“Here, sit down my beautiful Fräulein. Unfortunately you are a little too tall for me! That’s better–now we are just right!”

She bowed gracefully, then went down on one knee.

“Rosalinde,” she chirped. “Rosalinde! Permit a knight errant to steal a kiss–”

“Alraune,” he began.

But she sprang up, clapped her hand over his lips. “You must say ‘Mein Herr!’” she cried.

“Now then, will you permit me to steal a kiss Rosalinde?”

“Yes, Mein Herr,” he stammered.

Then she stepped behind him, took his head in both arms and she began, hesitated.

“First the ears,” she laughed. “The right and now the left, and the cheeks, both of them–and your stupid nose that I have so often kissed. Finally–lookout Rosalinde, your beautiful mouth.”

She bent lower, pressed her curly head against his shoulder under his hat. But she pulled back again.

“No, no, beautiful maiden, leave your hands! They must rest quietly in your lap.”

He laid his shivering hands on his knee and closed his eyes. Then she kissed him, slowly and passionately. At the end her small teeth sought his lip, bit it quickly so that heavy drops of red blood fell down onto the snow.

She tore herself loose, stood in front of him, staring blankly at the moon with wide-open eyes. A sudden chill seized her, threw a shiver over

her slender limbs.

“I’m freezing,” she whispered.

She raised one foot up and then the other.

“The stupid snow is everywhere inside my dance slippers!”

She pulled a slipper off and shook it out.

“Put my shoes on,” he cried. “They are bigger and warmer.”

He quickly slipped them off and let her step into them.

“Is that better?”

“Yes,” she laughed. “I feel good again. For that I will give you another kiss, Rosalinde.”

And she kissed him again–and again she bit him. Then they both laughed at how the moon lit up the red stains on the white ground.

“Do you love me, Wolf Gontram?” she asked.

He said, “I think of nothing else but you.”

She hesitated a moment, then asked again–“If I wanted it–would you jump from the balcony?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Even from the roof?”

He nodded.

“Even from the tower of the Münster Cathedral?”

He nodded again.

“Would you do anything for me, Wölfchen?” she asked.

“Yes, Alraune,” he said, “if you loved me.”

She pursed her lips, rocked her hips lightly.

“I don’t know whether I love you,” she said slowly. “Would you do it even if I didn’t love you?”

His gorgeous eyes that his mother had given him shone, shone fuller and deeper than they had ever done and the moon above, jealous of those eyes, hid from them, concealing itself behind the cathedral tower.

“Yes,” said the boy. “Yes, even then.”

She sat on his lap, wrapped her arms around his neck.

“For that, Rosalinde–for that I will kiss you for a third time.”

And she kissed him again, still longer and more passionately and she bit him–more wildly and deeply. But they couldn’t see the heavy drops in the snow any more because the jealous moon had hidden its silver torch.

“Come,” she whispered. “Come, we must go!”

They exchanged shoes, beat the snow off their clothing, opened the door and stepped back inside, slipped behind the curtain and into the hall. The arc-lamps overhead were glaring; the hot and sticky air stifled them.

Wolf Gontram staggered as he let go of the curtain, grasping quickly at his chest with both hands.

She noticed it. “Wölfchen?” she cried.

He said, “It’s nothing, nothing at all–just a twinge! But it’s all right now.”

Hand in hand they walked through the hall.

Wolf Gontram didn’t come into the office the next day, never got out of bed, lay in a raging fever. He lay like that for nine days. He was often delirious, called out her name–but not once during this time did he come back to consciousness.

Then he died. It was pneumonia.

They buried him outside, in the new cemetery.

Fräulein ten Brinken sent a large garland of full, dark roses.

Chapter Eleven

Renders to the reader the end of the Privy Councilor through Alraune.

O **N** leap year night a storm blew in over the Rhine. Coming in from the south it seized the ice flows, pushing them downstream, piling them on top of each other and crashing them against the old toll bridge. It tore the roof off the Jesuit church, blew down ancient linden trees in the courtyard garden, loosened the moorings of the strong pontoon boat of the swimming school and dashed it to pieces on the mighty pillars of the stone bridge.

The storm chased through Lendenich as well. Three chimneys tumbled down from the community center and the old Hahnenwirt's barn was destroyed. But the worst thing it did was to the house of ten Brinken. It blew out the eternal lamps that burned at the shrine of St. John of Nepomuk.

That had never been seen before, not in the several hundred years that the Manor house had stood. The devout villagers quickly refilled the lamps and lit them again the next morning, but they said it portended a great misfortune and the end of the Brinken's was certain.

That night had proved that the Saint had now turned his hand away from the Lutheran house. No storm in the world could have extinguished those lamps unless he allowed it.

It was an omen, that's what the people said. But some whispered that it hadn't been the storm winds at all. The Fräulein had been outside around midnight–she had extinguished the lamps.

But it appeared as if the people were wrong in their prophecies. Large parties were held in the mansion even though it was lent. All the windows

were brightly lit one night after the other. Music could be heard along with laughter and loud singing.

The Fräulein demanded it. She needed distraction, she said, after her bereavement and the Privy Councilor did as she wished. He crept behind her where ever she went. It was almost as if he had taken over Wőlfchen's role.

His squinting glance sought her out when she stepped into the room and followed her when she left. She noticed how the hot blood crept through his old veins, laughed brightly and tossed her head. Her moods became more capricious and her demands became more exaggerated.

The old man handled it by always demanding something in return, having her tickle his bald head or play her quick fingers up and down his arm, demanding that she sit on his lap or even kiss him. Time after time he urged her to come dressed as a boy.

came in riding clothes, in her lace clothing from the Candlemass ball, as a fisher boy with opened shirt and naked legs, or as an elevator boy in a red, tight fitting uniform that showed off her hips. She also came as a mountain climber, as Prince Orlowski, as Nerissa in a court clerk's gown, as Piccolo in a black dress suit, as a Rococo page, or as Euphorion in tricots and blue tunic.

The Privy Councilor would sit on the sofa and have her walk back and forth in front of him. His moist hands rubbed across his trousers, his legs slid back and forth on the carpet and with bated breath he would search for a way to begin–

She would stand there looking at him, challenging him, and under her gaze he would back down. He searched in vain but could not find the words that could cover his disgusting desires and veil them in a cute little jacket.

Laughing mockingly she would leave–as soon as the door latch clicked shut, as soon as he heard her clear laughter on the stairs–the thoughts would come to him. Then it was easy, then he knew exactly what to say, what he

should have said. He often called out after her–sometimes she even came back.

“Well?” she asked.

But it didn’t work; again it didn’t work.

“Oh, nothing,” he grumbled.

That was it, his confidence had failed him. He searched around for some other victim just to convince himself that he was still master of his old skills. He found one, the little thirteen-year-old daughter of the tinsmith that had been brought to the house to repair some kettles.

“Come along, little Marie,” he said. “There is something I want to give you.”

He pulled her into the library. After a half hour the little one slunk past him in the hall like a sick, wild animal with wide open, staring eyes, pressing herself tightly against the wall–

Triumphant, with a broad smile, the Privy Councilor stepped across the courtyard, back into the mansion. Now he was confident–but now Alraune avoided him, came up when he seemed calm but pulled back confused when his eyes flickered.

“She plays–she’s playing with me!” grated the professor.

Once, as she stood up from the table he grabbed her hand. He knew exactly what he wanted to say, word for word–yet forgot it instantly. He got angry at himself, even angrier at the haughty look the girl gave him.

Quickly, violently, he sprang up, twisted her arm around and threw her screaming down onto the divan. She fell–but was back on her feet again before he could get to her. She laughed, laughed so shrilly and loudly that it hurt his ears. Then without a word she stepped out of the room.

She stayed in her rooms, wouldn’t come out for tea, not to dinner. She was not seen for days. He pleaded at her door–said nice things to her,

implored and begged. But she wouldn’t come out. He pushed letters in to her, swore and promised her more and still more, but she didn’t answer.

One day after he had whimpered for hours before her door she finally opened it.

“Be quiet,” she said. “It bothers me–what do you want?”

He asked for forgiveness, said it had been a sudden attack, that he had lost control over his senses–

She spoke quietly, “You lie!”

Then he let all masks fall, told her how he desired her, how he couldn’t breathe without her around, told her that he loved her.

She laughed out loud at him but agreed to negotiate and made her conditions. He still searched here and there trying to find ways to get an advantage.

“Once, just once a week she should come dressed as a boy–”

“No,” she cried. “Any day if I want to–or not at all if I don’t want to.”

That was when he knew he had lost and from that day on he was the Fräulein’s slave, without a will of his own. He was her obedient hound, whimpering around her, eating the crumbs that she deliberately knocked off the table for him. She allowed him to run around in his own home like an old mangy animal that lived on charity–only because no one cared enough to kill it.

She gave him her commands, “Purchase flowers, buy a motorboat. Invite these gentlemen on this day and these others on the next. Bring down my purse.”

He obeyed and felt richly rewarded when she suddenly came down dressed as an Eton boy with a high hat and large round collar, or if she stretched out her little patent leather shoes so he could tie the silk laces.

Sometimes when he was alone he would wake up. He would slowly lift his ugly head, shake it back and forth and brood about what had happened. Hadn't he become accustomed to rule for generations? Wasn't his will law in the house of ten Brinken?

To him it was as if a tumor had swelled up in the middle of his brain and crushed his thoughts or some poisonous insect had crawled in through his ears or nose and stung him. Now it whirled around right in front of his face, mockingly buzzed in front of his eyes–why didn't he kill it?

He got half way up, struggling with resolution.

"This must come to an end," he murmured.

But he forgot everything as soon as he saw her. Then his eyes opened, his ears grew sharp, listening for the rustle of her silk. Then his mighty nose sniffed the air greedily, taking in the fragrance of her body, making his old fingers tremble, making him lick the spittle from his lips with his tongue.

All of his senses crept toward her, eagerly, lecherously, poisonously, filled with loathsome vices and perversions–that was the strong cord on which she held him.

Herr Sebastian Gontram came out to Lendenich and found the Privy Councilor in the library.

"You have got to be careful," he said. "We are going to have a lot of trouble getting things back in order. You should be a little more concerned about it, your Excellency."

"I have no time," answered the Privy Councilor.

"That's not good enough," said Herr Gontram quietly. "You must have some time for this. You haven't taken care of anything this past week, just let everything go. Be careful your Excellency, it could cost you dearly."

"Ok," sneered the Privy Councilor. "What is it then?"

“I just wrote you about it,” answered the Legal Councilor. “But it seems you don’t read my letters any more. The former director of the Wiesbaden museum has written a brochure, as you know, in which he has made all kinds of assertions. For that he was brought in front of the court. He moved to have the pieces in question examined by experts. Now the commission has examined your pieces and for the most part they have been declared forgeries. All the newspapers are full of it. The accused will certainly be acquitted.”

“Let him be,” said the Privy Councilor.

“That’s all right with me, your Excellency, if that is what you want!” Gontram continued, “But he has already filed a new suit against you with the District Attorney and the authorities must act on it.

By the way, that is not everything, not by far. In the Gerstenberger foundry bankruptcy case the bankruptcy administrator has placed an accusation against you on the basis of several documents. You are being accused of concealing financial records, swindling and cheating. A similar accusation has been filed, as you know, by the Karpen brickworks.

Finally Attorney Kramer, representing the tinsmith Hamecher, has succeeded in having the District Attorney’s office order a medical examination of his little daughter.

“The child lies,” cried the professor. “She is a hysterical brat.”

“All the better,” nodded the Legal Councilor. “Then your innocence will surely come out.”

“A little more distant there is a lawsuit by the merchant Matthiesen for damages and reimbursements of fifty thousand Marks that comes with another accusation of fraud.

In a new lawsuit in the case of Plutus manufacturing the opposing attorney is charging you with falsification of documents and has declared as well that he wants to take the necessary steps to bring it into criminal court.

You see, your Excellency, how the cases multiply when you don't come into the office for a long time. Scarcely a day goes by without something new being filed."

"Are you finished yet?" the Privy Councilor asked.

"No," said Herr Gontram calmly, "absolutely not. Those were only some little flowers from the beautiful bouquet that is waiting for you in the city. I advise your Excellency, insist that you come in. Don't take these things so lightly."

But the Privy Councilor answered, "I told you already that I don't have any time. You really shouldn't bother me with these trifles and just leave me alone."

The Legal Councilor rose up, put his documents in his leather portfolio and closed it slowly.

"As you will, your Excellency," he said. "By the way, do you know there is a rumor these days that the Műhlhelmer credit bank is going to stop payments?"

"Nonsense," he replied. "In any case I've scarcely put any money into it."

"You haven't?" asked Herr Gontram, a little surprised. "For half a year now you have kept that institution on a sound financial basis with over eleven million. You did it to gain tighter control of the potash industry! I, myself, was obliged to sell Princess Wolkonski's mines to fund the cause."

His Excellency ten Brinken nodded, "The princess–well yes–am I the princess?"

The Legal Councilor rocked his head thoughtfully.

"She will lose her money," he murmured.

"What's that to me," cried the Privy Councilor. "Anyway, we will see what can be saved."

He stood up, drummed on the writing desk with his hand.

“You are right, Herr Legal Councilor. I should pay more attention to my affairs. Please expect me at the office around six-o’clock. I thank you.”

He shook hands and accompanied him to the door.

But he didn’t drive into the city that afternoon. Two lieutenants came to tea, he kept finding reasons for going back into the room on one pretext or another, couldn’t stand to go out of the house. He was jealous of every man Alraune spoke with, of the chair she sat on and the very carpet she walked on. He didn’t go the next day or the next.

The Legal Councilor sent one messenger after another. He sent them away without an answer, disconnected his phone so he wouldn’t get any more calls.

Then the Legal Councilor turned to Alraune, told her that it was very important for the Privy Councilor to come into the office. She rang for her car, sent her maid to the library to tell the Privy Councilor to get ready for a drive into the city with her.

He trembled with joy. It was the first time in weeks that she had gone driving with him. He donned his fur coat, went out into the courtyard, opened the car door for her. She didn’t speak, but he was happy enough to be permitted to sit next to her. She drove directly to the office and told him to get out.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Shopping,” she answered.

“Will you pick me back up?” he begged.

She laughed, “I don’t know. Perhaps.”

He was grateful enough for the ‘perhaps’. He climbed up the stairs and opened the door on the left to the Legal Councilor’s room.

“Here I am,” he said.

The Legal Councilor shoved the documents at him, a huge pile of them.

“Here’s the junk,” he nodded. “A pretty collection. There are a couple of old cases that for a long time appeared to be settled. They’ve taken off again. There are also a couple of new ones since the day before yesterday!”

The Privy Councilor sighed. “A bit much–would you give me a report, Herr Legal Councilor?”

Gontram shook his head, “Wait until Manasse comes. He knows more about them. He will be here soon. I’ve called for him. Right now he is with the Examiner in the Hamecher case.”

“Hamecher?” asked the professor. “Who is that?”

“The tinker,” the Legal Councilor reminded him. “The expert opinion of the doctor was very incriminating. The Public Prosecutor has ordered an investigation–there lies the summons–by the way, it appears to me that this case is the most important one right now.”

The Privy Councilor took up the documents and leafed through them, one after the other. But he was restless, listened nervously at every phone ring, every step that sounded through the hallway.

“I only have a little time,” he said.

The Legal Councilor shrugged his shoulders and calmly lit a fresh cigar. They waited, but the attorney didn’t appear. Gontram telephoned his office, then the court, but couldn’t reach him anywhere.

The professor pushed the documents to the side.

“I can’t read them today,” he said. “I don’t have any interest in them.”

“Perhaps you are sick, your Excellency,” opined the Legal Councilor. He ordered some wine and seltzer water. Then the Fräulein came. The Privy

Councilor heard the auto drive up and stop. He immediately sprang up and grabbed his fur coat. He met her coming up the corridor.

“Are you ready?” she cried.

“Naturally,” he returned. “Completely.”

But the Legal Councilor stepped between them.

“It’s not true, Fräulein. We have not even begun. We are waiting for Attorney Manasse.”

The old man exclaimed, “Nonsense! It is all entirely trivial. I’m riding back with you, child.”

She looked at the Legal Councilor who spoke, “These papers appear very important to me.”

“No, no,” insisted the Privy Councilor.

But Alraune decided. “You will stay! Adieu, Herr Gontram,” she cried.

Then she turned around and ran down the stairs. He went back into the room, stepped up to the window, watched her climb into the car and leave. Then he stayed standing there, looking out onto the street into the dusk.

Herr Gontram ordered the gaslights turned on, sat quietly in his easy chair, smoked and drank his wine. They were still waiting when the office closed. One after the other, the employees left, opened their umbrellas and stepped carefully through the mud on the street. Neither spoke a word.

Finally the attorney came, hurried up the stairs, tore open the door.

“Good evening,” he growled, put his umbrella in a corner, pulled off his galoshes, threw his wet jacket onto the sofa.

“High time, Herr Colleague,” said the Legal Councilor.

“High time, yes, it is certainly high time!” he came back.

He went right up to the Privy Councilor, stood right in front of him and screamed in his face.

“The warrant is out!”

“What warrant?” hissed the Privy Councilor.

“What warrant?” mocked the attorney. “I’ve seen it with my own eyes–the Hamecher case! It will be served early tomorrow morning at the latest.”

“We must stand bail,” observed the Legal Councilor carelessly.

The little attorney spun around; “Don’t you think I already thought of that!–I immediately offered to stand bail–half a million–right away–denied! The mood has turned sour at the county court your Excellency. I’ve always thought it would happen some day.

The judge was very cool and told me, ‘Please put your request in writing, Herr Attorney. But I fear that you will have little luck with it. Our evidence is overwhelming–and it appears that extreme care must be taken.’

Those were his exact words! Not very edifying is it?”

He poured himself a full glass, emptied it in short gulps.

“I can tell you more, your Excellency! I met with Attorney Meir II at court; he is our opposition in the Gerstenberg case. He also represents the municipality of Huckingen, which filed suit against you yesterday. I asked him to wait for me–then I had a long talk with him. That is the reason I am so late getting here, Herr Colleague. He talked straight with me–we are loyal to each other at county court, thank God!

That’s when I learned the opposing lawyers have united, they already had a long conference the day before yesterday. A couple of newspaper reporters were there as well. One of them was sharp Dr. Landmann from the

General Advertiser. You know very well, your Excellency, that you haven't put a penny of money into that paper!

The roles are well divided. I tell you–this time you won't get out of the trap so easily!"

The Privy Councilor turned to Herrn Gontram.

"What do you think, Herr Legal Councilor?"

"Wait," he declared. "There will be a way out of it."

But Manasse screamed, "I tell you there is no way out of it! The noose is knotted, it will tighten–you will hang, your Excellency, if you don't give the gallows ladder a quick shove ahead of time!"

"What do you advise then," asked the professor.

"Exactly the same thing that I advised poor Dr. Mohnen, whom you have on your conscience, your Excellency! That was a meanness of you–yet what good does it do if I tell you the truth now?

I advise that you liquidate everything you possibly can. By the way, we can do that without you. Pack your bags and clear out–tonight! That's what I advise."

"They will issue a warrant," opined the Legal Councilor.

"Certainly," cried Manasse. "But they will not give it any special urgency. I already spoke with Colleague Meir about it. He shares my opinion. It is not in the interest of the opposition to create a scandal – the authorities would be happy enough if they could avoid one as well.

They only want to render you harmless, your Excellency, put an end to your doings–and for that–believe you me–they now have the means. But if you disappear, live somewhere in a foreign land, we could wrap this thing up quietly. It would cost a lot of money–but what does that matter? They would be lenient on you, even today yet. It is really in their own interests to not throw this magnificent fodder to the radical and socialistic press."

He remained quiet, waiting for an answer. His Excellency ten Brinken paced slowly back and forth across the room with heavy, dragging steps.

“How long do you believe I must stay away?” he asked finally.

The little attorney turned around to face him, “How long!” he barked. “What a question! For just as long as you live! You can be happy that you still have this possibility at least. It will certainly be more pleasant to spend your millions in a beautiful villa on the Riviera than to finish out your life in prison! It will come to that, I guarantee you!–By the way, the authorities themselves have opened this little door for you. They could just as easily have issued the warrant this morning. Then it would have already been carried out! Damned decent of them, but they will be disgusted and take it very badly if you don’t make use of this little door.

If they must act, they will act decisively. Then your Excellency, this night will be your last night’s sleep as a free man.”

The Legal Councilor said, “Travel! After hearing all that it really does seem to be the best thing.”

“Oh yes,” snapped Manasse. “The best–the best all the way around, and the only thing as well. Travel! Disappear–step out–never to be seen again–and take the Fräulein, your daughter, along with you–Lendenich will thank you for it and our city as well.”

The Privy Councilor pricked up his ears at that. For the first time that evening a little life came into his features, penetrating through the staring apathetic mask, flickering with a light nervous restlessness.

“Alraune,” he whispered. “Alraune–if she goes with–he wiped his mighty brow with his coarse hand, twice, three times. He sank down, asked for a glass of wine, and emptied it.

“I believe you are right, Gentlemen,” he said. “I thank you. Now let’s get everything in order.

He took the stack of documents and handed over the top one, “The Karpen brickyards–If you please–”

The attorney began calmly, objectively, gave his report. He took the next document in turn, weighed all the options, every slightest chance for a defense, and the Privy Councilor listened to him, threw a word in here and there, sometimes found a new possibility, like in the old times.

With each case the professor became clearer, his reasoning better thought out. Each new danger appeared to awaken and strengthen his old resiliency. He separated out a number of cases as comparatively harmless. But there still remained more than enough to get his neck broken.

He dictated a couple of letters, gave a lot of instructions, made notes to himself, outlined proposals and complaints–then he studied the time tables with the Herren, making his travel plans, giving exact instructions for the next meeting. As he left his office it was with the conviction that his affairs were in order.

He took a hired car and drove back to Lendenich, confident and self-assured. It was only as the servant opened the gate for him, as he walked across the courtyard and up the steps of the mansion, it was only then that his confidence left him.

He searched for Alraune and took it as a good omen that no guests were there. He heard from the maid that she had dined alone and was now in her rooms so he went up there. He stepped inside at her, ‘Come in.’

“I must speak with you,” he said.

She sat at her writing desk, looked up briefly.

“No,” she cried. “I don’t want to right now.”

“It is very important,” he pleaded. “It is urgent.”

She looked at him, lightly crossed her feet.“Not now,” she answered. “–Go down–in a half hour.”

He went, took off his fur coat, sat down on the sofa and waited. He considered how he should tell her, weighed every sentence and every word. After a good hour he heard her steps.

He got up, went to the door–there she stood in front of him, as an elevator boy in a tight fitting strawberry red uniform.

“Ah,” he said, “that is kind of you.”

“Your reward,” she laughed. “Because you have obeyed so beautifully today–now tell me, what is it?”

The Privy Councilor didn’t gloss things over, he told her everything, like it was, each little detail without any embellishments. She didn’t interrupt, let him speak and confess.

“It is really your fault,” he said. “I would have taken care of it all without much trouble–but I let it all go, have been so preoccupied with you, they grew like the heads of the Hydra.”

“The evil Hydra”–she mocked, “and now she is giving poor, good Hercules so much trouble! By the way, it seems that this time the hero is a poisonous salamander and the monstrous Hydra is the punishing avenger.”

“Certainly,” he nodded, “from the viewpoint of the people. They have their ‘justice for everyone’ and I have made my own. That is really my only crime. I believed that you would understand.”

She laughed in delight, “Certainly daddy, why not? Am I reproaching you? Now tell me, what are you going to do?”

He proposed his plans to her, one after the other, that they had to flee, that very night–take a little trip and see the world. Perhaps first to London, or to Paris–they could stay there until they got everything they needed. Then over the ocean, across America–to Japan–or to India–whatever they wanted, even both, there was no hurry. They had time enough. Then finally to Palestine, to Greece, Italy and Spain. Where ever she wanted–there they could stay and leave again when they had enough. Finally they could buy a

villa somewhere on Lake Garda or on the Riviera. Naturally it would be in the middle of a large garden.

She could have her horses and her cars, even a yacht. She could fill the entire house with people if she wanted–

He wasn't stingy with his promises, painted in glowing colors all the tempting splendors that awaited her, was always finding new and more alluring reasons that she should go.

Finally he stopped, asked his question, "Now child, what do you say to that? Wouldn't you like to live like that?"

She sat on the table with her slender legs dangling.

"Oh yes," she nodded. "Very much so–only–only–"

"Only?"–he asked quickly. "If you wish something else–say it! I will fulfill it for you."

She laughed at him, "Well then, fulfill this for me! I would very much like to travel–only not with you!"

The Privy Councilor took a step back, almost fell, grabbed onto the back of a chair. He searched for words and found none.

She spoke, "With you it would be boring for me–you are tiresome to me–I want to go without you!"

He laughed, attempting to persuade himself that she was joking.

"But I am the one that must be leaving right away," he said. "I must leave–tonight yet!"

"Then leave," she said quietly. "I'm staying."

He began all over again, imploring and lamenting. He told her that he needed her, like the air that he breathed. She should have compassion on

him–soon he would be eighty and wouldn't be a burden to her very much longer.

Then he threatened her again, screamed that he would disinherit her, throw her out into the street without a penny.

"Just try it," she threw back at him.

He spoke yet again, painting the wonderful splendors that he wanted to give her. She should be free, like no other girl, to do and have as she desired. There was no wish, no thought that he couldn't turn into reality for her. She only had to come with–not leave him alone.

She shook her head. "I like it here. I haven't done anything–I'm staying."

She spoke quietly and calmly, never interrupted him, let him talk and make promises, start all over again. But she shook her head whenever he asked the question.

Finally she sprang down from the table and went with soft steps toward the door, passing him.

"It is late," she said. "I am tired. I'm going to bed–good night daddy, happy travels."

He stepped into her way, made one last attempt, sobbed out that he was her father, that children had a duty to their parents, spoke like a pastor.

She laughed at that, "So I can go to heaven!"

She stood near the sofa, set down astride the arm.

"How do you like my leg?" she cried suddenly and stretched her slender leg out toward him, moving it back and forth in the air.

He stared at her leg, forgot what he wanted, thought no more about flight or danger, saw nothing else, felt nothing–other than her slender strawberry red boy's leg that swung back and forth before his eyes.

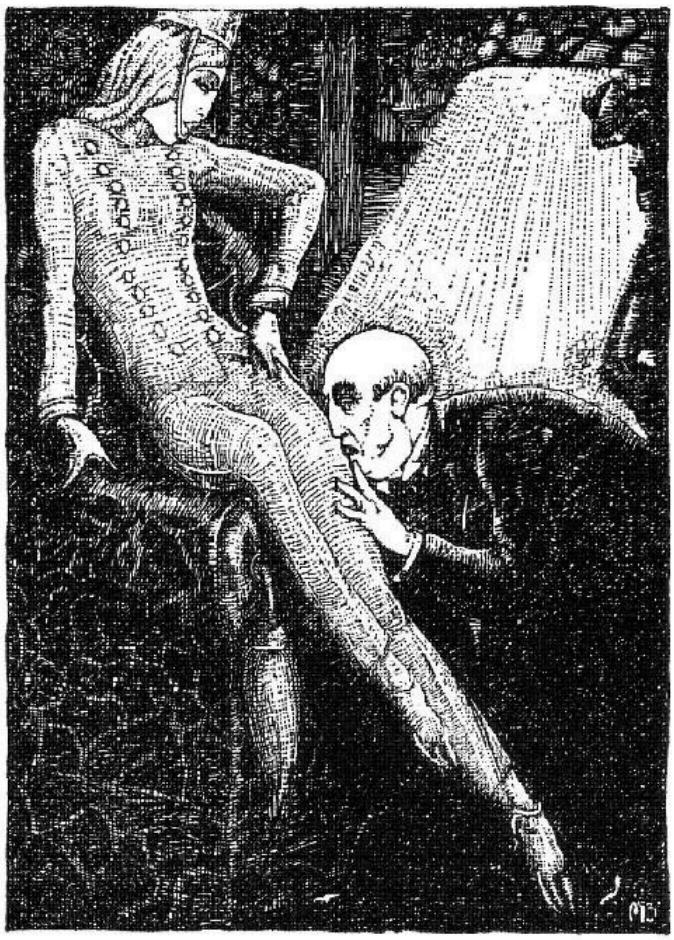
“I am a good child,” she tittered. “A very dear child that makes her stupid daddy very happy–kiss my leg, daddy–caress my beautiful leg daddy!”

He fell heavily onto his knees, grabbed at her red leg, moved his straying fingers over her thigh and her tight calf, pressed his moist lips on the red fabric, licked slowly along it with his trembling tongue.

Then she sprang up, lightly and nimbly, tugged on his ear, and patted him softly on the cheek.

“Now daddy,” her voice tinkled, “have I fulfilled my duty well enough? Good night then! Happy travels–and don’t get caught–it would be very unpleasant in prison. Send me some pretty picture postcards, you hear?”

She was at the door before he could get up, made a bow, short and stiff like a boy and put her right hand to her cap.



He forgot what he wanted, thought no more about flight or danger

“It has been an honor, your Excellency,” she cried. “And don’t make too much noise down here while you are packing–it might disturb my sleep.”

He swayed towards her, saw how quickly she ran up the stairs. He heard the door open upstairs, heard the latch click and the key turn in it twice. He wanted to go after her, laid his hand on the banister. But he felt that she would not open, despite all his pleading. That door would remain closed to him even if he stood there for hours through the entire night until dawn, until–until–until the constable came to take him away.

He stood there unmoving, listening to her light steps above him, back and forth through her room. Then no more. Then it was silent.

He slipped out of the house, went bare headed through the heavy rain across the courtyard, stepped into the library, searched for matches, lit a couple of candles on his desk. Then he let himself fall heavily into his easy chair.

Who is she," he whispered. "What is she? What a creature!" he muttered.

He unlocked the old mahogany desk, pulled a drawer open, took out the leather bound volume and laid it in front of him.

He stared at the cover, "A.T. B.", he read, half out loud. "Alraune ten Brinken."

The game was over, totally over, he sensed that completely. And he had lost – he held no more cards in his hand. It had been his game; he alone had shuffled the cards. He had held all the trumps–and now he had lost anyway.

He smiled grimly, now he had to pay the price.

Pay the price? Oh yes, but in what coin?

He looked at the clock–it was past twelve. The people would come with the warrant around seven o'clock at the latest–he still had over six hours. They would be very considerate, very polite–they would even bring him into custody in his own car. Then–then the battle would begin. That would not be too bad–he would defend himself through several months, dispute every move his opponents made.

But finally–in the main case–he would lose anyway. Manasse had that right. Then it would be–prison–or flee–but alone. Entirely alone? Without her? In that moment he felt how he hated her, but he also knew as well that he could think of nothing else any more, only her. He could run around the

world aimlessly, without purpose, not seeing, not hearing anything but her bright twittering voice, her slender swinging red leg.

Oh, he would starve, out there or in prison–either way. Her leg–her sweet slender boy's leg! Oh how could he live without that red leg?

The game was lost–he must pay the bill, better to pay it quickly, this very night–with the only thing of value he had left–with his life. And since it wasn't worth anything any more, perhaps he could bring someone else down with him.

That did him good, now he brooded about whom to take down with him. Someone that would give him a little satisfaction to give one final last kick.

He took his last will and testament out of the desk, which named Alraune as his heir, read through it, then carefully tore it into small pieces.

"I must make a new one," he whispered. "Only for whom?–for whom?"

There was his sister–was her son, Frank Braun, his nephew–

He hesitated, him–him? Wasn't it him that had brought this poisonous gift into his house, this strange creature that had now ruined him?

He–just like the others! Oh, he should pay, even more than Alraune.

"You will tempt God," the fellow had said. "You will put a question to him, so audacious that He must answer."

Oh yes, now he had his answer! But if he inexorably had to go down, the youth should share his fate. He, Frank Braun, who had engendered this thought, given him the idea.

Now he had a bright shiny weapon, her, his little daughter, Alraune ten Brinken. She would bring him as well to the point where he was today. He considered, rocked his head and grinned in satisfaction at this certain final victory.

Then he wrote his will without pausing, in swift, ugly strokes. Alraune remained his heir, her alone. But he secured a legacy for his sister and another for his nephew, whom he appointed as executor and guardian of the girl until she came of age. That way he needed to come here, be near her, breathe the sultry air from her lips, and it would happen, like it had happened with all the others!

Like it had with the Count and with Dr. Mohnen, like it had with Wolf Gontram, like with the chauffeur–and finally, like it had happened with he, himself, as well.

He laughed out loud, made still another entry, that the university would inherit if Alraune died without an heir. That way his nephew would be shut out in any case. Then he signed the document and dated it.

He took the leather bound volume, read further, wrote the early history and conscientiously brought everything up to date. He ended it with a little note to his nephew, dripping with derision.

“Try your luck,” he wrote. “To bad that I won’t be there when your turn comes. I would have been very glad to see it!”

He carefully blotted the wet ink, closed the book and laid it back in the drawer with the other momentos, the necklace of the Princess, the alraune of the Gontrams, the dice cup, the white card with a hole shot through it that he had taken out of the count’s vest pocket. “Mascot” was written on it. Near it lay a four leaf clover–several black drops of clotted blood still clung to it–

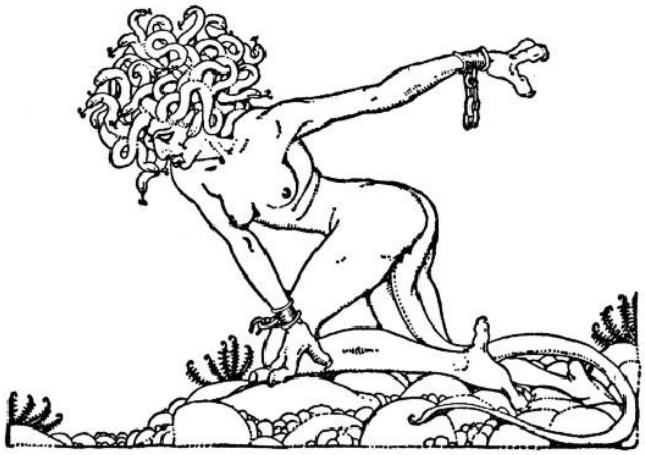
He stepped up to the curtain and untied the silk cord. With a long scissors he cut the end off and threw it into the drawer with the others. “Mascot’, he laughed. “Luck for the house!”

He searched around the walls, climbed onto a chair and with great difficulty took down a mighty iron cross from a heavy hook, laid it carefully on the divan.

“Excuse me,” he grinned, “for moving you out of your place–it will only be for a short time–only for a few hours–you will have a worthy replacement!”

He knotted the cord, threw it high over the hook, pulled on it, considered it, that it would hold–and he climbed for a second time onto the chair–

The police found him early the next morning. The chair was pushed over; nevertheless the dead man stood on it with the tip of one toe. It appeared as if he had regretted the deed and at the last moment tried to save himself. His right eye stood wide open, squinting out toward the door and his thick blue tongue protruded out–he looked very ugly.



Intermezzo

Perhaps your quiet days, my blonde little sister, will also drop like silver bells that ring softly with slumbering sins.

Laburnums now throw their poisonous yellow where the pale snow of the acacias once lay. Ardent clematis show their deep blue where the devout clusters of wisteria once peacefully resounded.

Sweet is the gentle game of lustful desire; yet sweeter to me are all the cruel raging passions of the nighttime. Yet sweeter than any of these to me now is sweet sleeping sin on a hot summer afternoon.

– She slumbers lightly, my gentle companion, and I dare not awaken her. She is never more beautiful than when she is sleeping like this. In the mirror my darling sin rests, near enough, resting in her thin silken shift on white linen.

Your hand, little sister, falls over the edge of the bed. Your slender finger that carries my gold band is gently curling. Your transparent rosy nails glow like the first light of morning. Fanny, your black maid, manicured them. It was she that created these little marvels.

And I kiss your marvelous transparent rosy nails in the mirror.

Only in the mirror–in the mirror only. Only with loving glances and the light touch of my lips.

They will grow, if sin awakes, they will grow, become the sharp claws of a tiger, tearing my flesh–

Your head rises out of the pillow, surrounded by golden locks. They fall around it lightly like flickering golden flames that awaken at the first breezes of early morning. Your little teeth smile out from your thin lips, like the milky opals in the glowing bracelet of the moon Goddess.

And I kiss your golden hair, sister, and your gleaming teeth–in the mirror–only in the mirror. With the soft touch of my lips and with loving glances.

For I know that if ardent sin awakes the milky opals become mighty fangs and the golden locks become fiery vipers. Then the claws of the tigress tear at my flesh, the sharp teeth bite dreadful, bloody wounds. Then

the flaming vipers hiss around my head, crawl into my ears, spray their venom into my brain, whisper and entice with a fairy tale of savage lust–

Your silken shift has fallen down from your shoulder, your childish breasts smile there, resting, like two white newborn kittens, lifting their sweet rosy noses into the air.

I look up at your gentle eyes, jeweled blue eyes that catch the light, that glow like the sapphire on the forehead of my golden Buddha figurine.

Do you see, sister, how I kiss them–in the mirror? No fairy has a lighter touch.

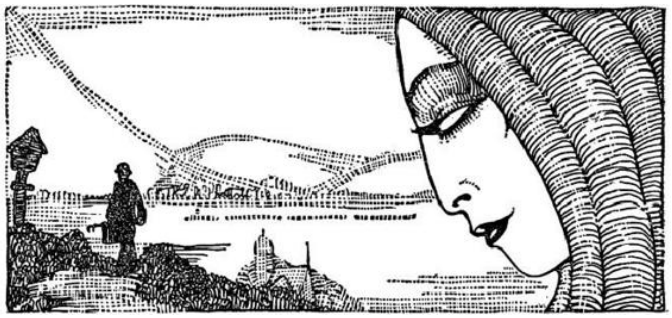
– For I know well, when she wakes up, my eternal sin, blue lightening will flash out of her eyes. It will strike my poor heart, making my blood boil and seethe, melting in ardent desire the strong chains that restrain me, till all becomes madness and then surges the entire–

Then hunts, free of her chains, the raging beast. She overpowers you, sister, in furious frenzy. Your sweet childish breasts become the giant breasts of a murderous fury–now that sin has awakened–she rends in joy, bites in fury, exults in pain and bathes in pools of blood.

But my glances are still silent, like the tread of nuns at the grave of a saint. Softer yet is the light touch of my lips, like the kiss of the Holy Ghost at communion that turns the bread into the body of our Lord.

She should not awaken, should remain peacefully sleeping–my beautiful sin.

Nothing, my love, is sweeter to me, than pure sin as you lightly sleep.



Chapter Twelve

Gives an account of how Frank Braun stepped into Alraune's world.

FRANK Braun had come back to his mother's house, somewhere from one of his aimless journeys, from Cashmir in Asia or from Bolivian Chaco. Or perhaps is was from the West Indies where he had played revolutionary in some mad republic, or from the South Seas, where he had dreamed fairytales with the slender daughters of a dying race. He came back from somewhere.

Slowly he walked through his mother's house, up the white staircase upon whose walls was pressed frame upon frame, old engravings and modern etchings, through his mother's wide rooms in which the spring sun fell through yellow curtains. There his ancestors hung, many Brinkens with sharp and clever faces, people that knew where they stood in the world.

There was his great-grandfather and great-grandmother–good portraits from the time of the Emperor, then one of his beautiful grandmother–sixteen years old, in the earlier dress of Queen Victoria. His father and mother hung there and his own portraits as well. There was one of him as a child with a large ball in his hands and long blonde child locks that fell over his shoulders. The other was of him as a youth, in the black velvet dress of a page, reading in a thick, ancient tome.

In the next room were the copies. They came from everywhere, from the Dresden Gallery, the Cassel and Braunshweig galleries, from the Palazzo Pitti, the Prado and from the Reich Museum. There were many Dutch masters, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Ostade, Murillo, Titian, Velasquez and Veronese. All were a little darkened with age, but they glowed reddish gold in the sunlight that broke through the curtains.

He went further, through the room where the modernists hung. There were several good paintings and some not as good. But not one of them was bad and there were no sweet ones.

All around stood old furniture, most of mahogany–Empire, Directoire or Biedermeir. There were none of oak but several simpler, modern pieces were scattered in between. There was no defined style, simply one after another as the years had brought them. Yet there was a quiet, pervasive harmony that transformed everything that stood there and made it belong.

He climbed up to the floor that his mother had given him. Everything was exactly as he had left it the last time he had departed–two years ago. No paperweight had been moved, no chair was out of place. Yes, his mother always watched to see that the maids were careful and respectful–despite all the cleaning and dusting.

Here, much more than anywhere else in the house, ruled a chaotic throng of innumerable, abstruse things. They were on the floors and on the walls. Five continents contributed strange and bizarre things to this room that were unique to them only.

There were large masks, savage wooden devil deities from the Bismarck Archipelago, Chinese and Annamite flags and many weapons from all regions of the world. Then there were hunting trophies, stuffed animals, Jaguar and tiger skins, huge turtle shells, snakes and crocodiles. There were colorful drums from Luzon, long necked stringed instruments from Raj Putana and crude castings from Albania.

On one wall hung a mighty, reddish brown fisherman’s net. It hung down from the ceiling and contained giant star fish, sea urchins, swords from swordfish, silver shimmering tarpon scales, mighty ocean spiders, strange deep-sea fish, mussels and snails.

The furniture was covered with old brocade and over it was thrown delicate silk garments from India, colorful Spanish jackets and mandarin cloaks with large golden dragons.

There were many gods as well, silver and gold Buddhas of all sizes, Indian bas-reliefs of Shiva, Krishna and Genesha along with the absurd, obscene stone idols of the Tchan tribes.

In between, where ever there was a free space on the wall, hung framed glass enclosed images, an impudent Rops, a savage Goya, small drawings by Jean Callots, Crűikshank, Hogarth and assorted colorful cruelties drawn on sheets of paper out of Cambodia and Mysore. Many moderns hung nearby bearing the artist's name and a dedication.

There was furniture of all styles from all cultures, thickly populated with bronzes, porcelains and unending bric-a-brac.

All these things were Frank Braun. His bullet killed the polar bear on whose white pelt he now stood. He, himself, caught the mighty blue shark whose powerful jaws hung there in the net with its three rows of teeth. He took these poisoned arrows and this spear from the savage Buca tribe. A Manchu priest gave him this foolish idol and this tall silver priest's clothes hanger.

Single handedly he stole this black thunderstone out of the forest temple of the Houdon–Badagri, drank with his own lips out of this Bombita in a Mate blood-brother ritual with the chief of the Toba Indians on the swampy banks of the Pilcomayo. For this curved sword he gave his best hunting rifle to a Malay sultan in North Borneo and for this other long executioner's sword he gave his little pocket chess game to the Vice Regent of Shantung.

These wonderful Indian carpets were presented to him by the Maharaja of Vigatpuri, whose life he had saved during an elephant hunt and this earthen eight armed Durga, begrimed with the blood of animals and people, he had received from the High Priest of the dreaded Kalis of Kalighat–

His life lay in these rooms, every mussel, every colored rag, reminded him of long past memories. There lay his opium pipes, over there the large mescal can that had been hammered together out of Mexican silver dollars. Near it was the small tightly locked container of snake venom from Ceylon and a golden arm band–with two magnificent cat's eyes–it had once been

given to him by an eternally laughing child in Birma. He had paid many kisses for them–

Scattered around on the floor, piled on top of each other, stood and lay crates and trunks–twenty-one of them. They contained his new treasures–none had been opened yet.

“Where can I put it all?” he laughed.

A long Persian spear stretched through the air across the large double window. A very large, snow white Cockatoo sat on it. It was a Macassar bird from South Africa with a high flamingo red crest.

“Good morning Peter!” Frank Braun greeted him.

“Atja Tuwan!” answered the bird.

He climbed solemnly over the spear and down to his stand. From there he clambered onto a chair and down to the floor, came with bowed stately strides up to him, climbed up onto his shoulder, spread out his proud crest and flung his wings out wide like the Prussian eagle.

“Atja, Tuwan! Atja, Tuwan!” he cried.

The white bird stretched out his neck and Frank Braun scratched it.

“How’s it going, little Peter?–Are you happy that I’m back again?”

Frank Braun climbed halfway down the staircase, stepped out onto the large covered balcony where his mother was drinking tea. Below, in the garden, the mighty chestnut trees glowed like candles, further back, in the monastery garden, lay an ocean of brilliant snow-white flowers. Brown robed Franciscans wandered under the laughing trees.

“There is Father Barnabas!” he cried.

His mother put her glasses on and looked, “No,” she answered. “That is Father Cyprian.”

A green amazon squatted on the iron railing of the balcony and as soon as he set the Cockatoo down, the cheeky little parrot came rushing up to it. It looked comical enough, walking sideways, like a shuffling Galatian peddler.

“All right,” he screamed. “All right–Lorita real di España e di Portugal!–Anna Mari-i-i-i-i-a!”

He pecked at the large bird, which just raised his crest and softly said, “cockatoo”.

“Still saucy as ever, Phylax?” Frank Braun asked.

“Every day he gets saucier,” laughed his mother. “Nothing is safe from him anymore. He would love to chew up the entire house.”

She dipped a piece of sugar in her tea and gave it to the bird on a silver spoon.

“Has Peter learned anything,” he asked.

“Nothing at all,” she replied. He only speaks his soft, “’Cockatoo’, along with some scraps of Malay.”

“Unfortunately you don’t understand any of that,” he laughed.

His mother said, “No, but I understand my green Phylax much better. He loves to talk, all day long, in all the languages of the world–always something new. Sometimes I lock him up in the closet, just to get a half hour of peace.”

She took the amazon, who was at that moment strolling across the middle of the table and attacking the butter, and set the struggling bird back up on the railing.

Her brown hound came up, stood on its hind legs and rested its little head on her knee.

“Yes, you are here too,” she said. “Would you like some tea?”

She poured tea and milk into a little red saucer, broke off some white bread and a piece of sugar, putting them in it as well.

Frank Braun looked down into the wide garden. Two round hedgehogs were playing on the lawn and nibbling at the young shoots. They must be ancient–he, himself, had once brought them out of the forest, from a school picnic. The male was named Wotan and the female, Tobias Meier. But perhaps these were their grandchildren or great-grandchildren–then he saw the little mound near the white, blooming magnolia bush. There he had once buried his black poodle. Two large yuccas grew there now, in the summer they would bloom with hundreds of white, resounding bells. But now, for spring, his mother had planted many colorful primroses there.

Ivy and other wild vines crawled up the high walls of the house, all the way up to the roof. There, twittering and making noise were the sparrows.

“The thrush has her nest over there, can you see?” asked his mother.

She pointed down to the wooden trellis that led from the courtyard into the garden. The round nest lay half-hidden in ivy. He had to search before he finally found it.

“It already has three little eggs,” he said.

“No, there are four,” his mother corrected him. “She laid the fourth one this morning.”

“Yes, four,” he nodded “Now I can see all of them. It is beautiful here mother.”

She sighed and laid her old hand on his. “Oh yes, my boy–it is beautiful–if only I wasn’t so lonely all the time.”

“Lonely,” he asked. “Don’t you have as many visitors as you used to?”

She said, “Oh yes, they come every day, many young people. They look after this old lady. They come to tea and to dinner. Everyone knows

how happy I am when someone comes to visit me. But you see, my boy, they are still strangers–you aren't."

"Well now I'm here," he said and changed the subject, described the various curiosities that he had brought back with him, asked her if she wanted to be there when he unpacked.

Then the girl came up bringing the mail that had just arrived. He tore his letters open and glanced fleetingly at them. He paused, looked at one more closely. It was a letter from Legal Councilor Gontram that briefly communicated what had happened at his uncle's house. There was also a copy of the will and his expressed wish that Frank Braun travel over as soon as possible to put the affairs in order. He, the Legal Councilor, had been court ordered to act as temporary executor. Now that he, Frank Braun, was once more back in Europe he begged him to take up his obligation.

His mother observed him–she knew his smallest gesture, the slightest movement of his smooth, sun tanned features. She read in the slight twitch at the corner of his mouth that it was something important.

"What is it?" she asked, and her voice trembled.

"Nothing big," he answered easily. "You know of course that Uncle Jakob is dead."

"Yes, I know that," she said. "It was sad enough."

"Well then," he nodded, "the Legal Councilor has sent me a copy of the will. I am the executor and to become the girl's guardian as well. To do that I must go to Lendenich."

"When will you leave?" she asked quickly.

"Well," he said. "I think–this evening."

"Don't go," she begged. "Don't go! You've only been back with me for three days and now you want to leave again."

“But mother,” he turned to face her. “It’s only for a few days, just to put things in order.”

She said, “That’s what you always say, only a few days–and then you stay away for years.”

“You must be able to see it, dear mother!” he insisted. “Here is the will. Uncle has left you a right decent sum of money and me as well–Something I certainly was not expecting from him. We could certainly use it, both of us.”

She shook her head, “What should I do with the money if you are not with me, my boy?”

He stood up and kissed her gray hair.

“Mother dear, by the end of the week I will be back here with you. It is scarcely two hours by train.”

She sighed deeply, stroked his hands, “Two hours–or two hundred hours, what is the difference?–You are gone either way!”

“Adieu, dear mother,” he said, went upstairs, packed only a small suitcase and came back out to the balcony.

“There, you see! Scarcely enough for two days–Auf Wiedersehen!”

“Auf Wiedersehen, dear boy,” she said quietly.

She heard how he bounded down the stairs, heard the latch click as the door shut. She laid her hand on the intelligent head of her little hound that looked at her with faithful trusting eyes.

“Dear animal,” she spoke. “Now we are alone again–Oh, only to go again, does he come here–when will we see him again?”

Heavy tears fell from her gentle eyes, rolled over the wrinkles on her cheeks, fell down onto the long brown ears of the little hound. He licked at them with his red tongue.

Then down below she heard the bell, heard voices and steps coming up the stairs. She quickly wiped the tears out of her eyes, pushed her black lace scarf into place and straightened out her hair. She stood up, leaned over the railing and called down into the courtyard for the cook to prepare fresh tea for the guests that had come.

Oh, it was good that so many came to visit her, Ladies and Gentlemen–today and always. She could chat with them, tell them about her boy.

Legal Councilor Gontram, whom he had wired about his arrival, awaited him at the train station, took him with to the garden terraces of the Royal Court, where he explained everything to him that was important. He begged him to go at once out to Lendenich, speak with the Fräulein and then early the next morning come back into the office.

He couldn't really say the Fräulein would make trouble for him, but he had a strange, uncomfortable feeling about her that made every meeting with her intolerable. It was funny in a way, he had worked with so many criminals–murderers, assassins, burglars, abortionists, and once he really got to know them he always found that they were really pretty decent people–with the exception of their crimes.

But with the Fräulein, whom you could not reproach for anything, he always had the same feeling that other people had toward the criminals he worked with. It must lie completely in him–

Frank Braun requested that he telephone ahead and announce his arrival to the Fräulein. Then he excused himself, strolled through the park until he hit the road to Lendenich.

He walked through the old village, past the statue of St. Nepomuk and nodded to him, stood in front of the Iron Gate and rang, looking into the courtyard. There was a large gas candelabra burning in the entrance where once a paltry little lantern had glowed. That was the only change that he saw.

Above, from her window the Fräulein looked down, searched the features of the stranger, and tried to recognize him in the flickering light. She saw how Aloys sped up, how he put the key in the lock more quickly than usual.

“Good evening young Master!” cried the servant and the stranger shook hands with him, called him by name, as if he had just come back to his own house after a little trip.

“How goes it, Aloys?”

Then the old coachman hobbled over the stones as quickly as his crippled leg would carry him.

“Young Master,” he crowed. “Young Master! Welcome to Brinken!”

Frank Braun exclaimed, “Froitsheim! Still here? Glad to see you again!”

He shook both hands vigorously. Then the cook came and the wide hipped house keeper. With them came Paul, the valet. The entire servants quarters emptied itself into the courtyard. Two old maids pressed to the front, stretching their hands out to him, but first, carefully wiping their hands on their aprons.

“Jesus Christ be praised!” the gardener greeted him and he laughed.

“In eternity, Amen!”

“The young Master is here!” cried the gray haired cook and gave Frank Braun’s suitcase to the valet.

Everyone stood around him, everyone demanded a personal greeting, a handshake, a friendly word, and the younger ones, those that didn’t know him, stood nearby, staring at him with open eyes and awkward smiles. Off to the side stood the chauffeur, smoking his short pipe. Even his indolent features showed a friendly smile.

Fräulein ten Brinken snapped her fingers.

“My guardian appears well liked here,” she said half out loud and she called down:

“Bring the Gentleman’s things up to his room–and you, Aloys, show him the way.”

Some frost fell on the fresh spring of his welcome. They let their heads drop, didn’t speak any more. Only Froitsheim shook his hand one last time, walked with him to the master staircase.

“It is good you are here, young Master.”

Frank Braun went up to his room, washed himself, and then followed the butler who announced that dinner was served. He stepped into the dining room and was left alone for a moment. He looked around, there, like always, stood the giant buffet, ostentatious as ever with the heavy golden plates that bore the crest of the Brinkens.

But no fruit lay on them today.

“It is still too early in the season,” he murmured, “or perhaps my cousin has no interest in the first fruits.”

Then the Fräulein came in from the other side, adorned in a black silk gown, richly set with lace down to her feet. She stood in the door a moment, then stepped in and greeted him.

“Good evening, Herr Cousin.”

She reached out her hand to him, but only the two fingertips. He pretended not to notice, taking her entire hand and shaking it vigorously. With a gesture she invited him to take his place and sat down across from him.

“May we be informal with each other?” she began.

“Certainly,” he nodded. “That has long been the custom with the Brinkens.”

He raised his glass, “To your health, little cousin.”

“Little cousin,” she thought. “He calls me little cousin, thinks of me as a doll.”

But she replied, “Prosit, big cousin.”

She emptied her glass, waved for the servant to refill it and drank once more, “To your health, Herr Guardian!”

That made him laugh. Guardian–guardian? It sounded so dignified–”Am I really that old?” he thought.

He answered, “And to you, little ward.”

She got angry–little ward, again; little?–Oh, it would soon be shown which of them was the superior.

“How is you mother?” she asked.

“Thank you,” he nodded. “Very well, thank you–haven’t you met her yet?–You could have visited her at least once.”

“She never visited us either,” she retorted.

Then when she saw his smile, she quickly added, “Really cousin, we never thought of it.”

“I can just imagine,” he said dryly.

“Papa scarcely spoke of her and not of you at all.”

She spoke a little too quickly, rushing herself. “I was really surprised, you know, when he made you–”

“Me too!” he interrupted her, “and he certainly had some reason for doing it.”

“A reason?” she asked. “What reason?”

He shrugged his shoulders, “I don’t know yet–but it will soon come out.”

The conversation never faltered. It was like a ball game; the short sentences flew back and forth. They remained polite, amiable and obliging, but they watched each other, were completely on their guards, and never came together. A taut net stretched itself between them.

After dinner she led him into the music room.

“Would you like some tea?” she asked.

But he requested whiskey and soda. They sat down, chatted some more. Then she stood up, went to the Grand piano.

“Should I sing something?” she asked.

“Please,” he said politely.

She raised the lid, sat down, then she turned around and asked:

“Any special request cousin?”

“No,” he replied. “I don’t know your repertoire, little cousin.”

She pressed her lips together. That is becoming a habit, she thought.

She struck a couple of notes, sang half a stanza, broke off, began another song, and broke that off as well. Then she sang a couple of measures of Offenbach, then a line from Grieg.

“You don’t appear to be in the right mood,” he observed calmly.

She laid her hands on her lap, remained quiet awhile, drummed nervously on her knees. Then she raised her hands, sank them quickly onto the keys and began:

There once was a shepherdess

And ron, ron and small patapon

There once was a shepherdess

Who kept her sheep

Ron, ron who kept her sheep

She turned toward him, pouting. Oh, yes, that little face surrounded by short curls could very well belong to a graceful shepherdess–

She made a cheese

And ron, ron and small patapon

She made a cheese

While milking her sheep

Ron, ron, while milking her sheep

Pretty shepherdess, he thought, and poor–little sheep. She moved her head, stretched her left foot sideways, tapped out a beat on the floor with a dainty shoe.

The naughty cat watched

And ron, ron and small patapon

The naughty cat watched

From a small distance away

Ron, ron, from a small distance away

If you touch it with your paws

And ron, ron, and small patapon

If you touch it with your paws

I will hit you with a stick

Ron, ron, I will hit you with a stick!

She turned and laughed at him, her bright teeth gleaming.

“Does she mean I should play her kitten?” he thought.

Her face became a little more serious, and her soft lowered voice rang with a mocking, veiled threat.

He did not touch it with his paws

And ron, ron and small patapon

He did not touch it with his paws

He ate it with his jaws

Ron, ron, he ate it with his jaws

The shepherdess got angry

And ron, ron and small patapon

The shepherdess got angry

She killed the kitten

Ron, ron, she killed the kitten

"Very pretty," he said. "Where did you learn that little nursery rhyme?"

"In the convent," she answered. "The sisters sang it."

He laughed, "Imagine that–in a convent! I would have never expected it–please finish it, little cousin."

She sprang up from the piano stool, "I am finished. The kitten is dead–that is how it ends!"

"Not entirely," he declared. "But your pious nuns feared the punishment–so they let the pretty shepherd girl go unpunished for her evil sin! Play again. I will tell you what happened to the shepherd girl after that."

She went back to the piano, played the melody.

Then he sang:

She went to confession

And ron, ron and small patapon

She went to confession

To get forgiveness

Ron, ron, to get forgiveness

I confess, my Father

And ron, ron, and small patapon

I confess, my Father

To killing my kitten

Ron, ron, to killing my kitten

My daughter, for penance

And ron, ron and small patapon

My daughter, for penance

We will embrace

Ron, ron, we will embrace

Penance is sweet

And ron, ron, and small patapon

Penance is sweet

We will begin

Ron, ron, we will do it again

“Finished,” she asked.

“Oh yes, very much so,” he laughed. “How do you like the moral, Alraune?”

It was the first time he had called her by her given name–that astounded her so much she didn’t pay attention to his question.

“Good,” she replied indifferently.

“Isn’t it though,” he cried. “A pretty moral that teaches little girls they will not be permitted to kill their kittens and go unpunished!”

He stood right in front of her and towered over her by at least two heads. She had to look up at him to catch his eye.

She thought, “How much difference a stupid thirty centimeters makes.”

She wished she were dressed in men’s clothing as well. Already her skirts gave her a disadvantage. Then immediately it occurred to her that she had never experienced these feelings with others. But she stretched herself up, tossed her head lightly:

“Not all shepherdesses have to serve such penance,” she twittered.

He parried, “And not all Father Confessors will let them off so lightly.”

She searched for a reply and found none. That made her angry. She dearly wanted to pay him back–in his own way. But this skill was new to her–it was like an uncommon language that she could understand completely, but couldn’t speak correctly herself.

“Good night, Herr Guardian,” she said quickly. “I’m going to bed.”

“Good night, little cousin,” he smiled. “Sweet dreams!”

She climbed up the stairs, didn’t run up them as usual, went slowly and thoughtfully. She didn’t like him, her cousin, not at all. But he attracted her, stimulated her, and goaded her into responding.

“We will be done with him soon enough,” she thought.

And as the lady’s maid loosened her bodice and handed her the long nightgown she said, “It’s good that he’s here, Katie. It breaks up the monotony.”

It almost made her happy that she had lost this advance skirmish.

Frank Braun had long conferences with Legal Councilor Gontram and Attorney Manasse. He consulted with the Chancery Judge about his guardianship and with the probate Judge. He was given the run around and became thoroughly vexed.

With the death of his uncle the criminal accusations were finally cut off, but the civil complaints had swollen to a high flood. All the little businessmen that had trembled at a squinting look from his Excellency now came forward with new demands and claims, seeking compensation for damages that were often quite dubious in nature.

“The District Attorney’s office has made peace with us,” said the old Legal Councilor, “and the police won’t bother us either. But despite all that, we still have the county court tightly packed with our cases alone–the second court room for the next six months will be the private institute of the late Privy Councilor.”

“His Deceasedness would enjoy it, if he could look out of his hellish cauldron,” the lawyer remarked. “He only enjoyed such suits a dozen at a time.”

He laughed as well, when Frank Braun handed him the Burberger mining shares that were his inheritance.

“The old man would have loved to be here now,” he said, “to see your face in half an hour! Just you wait, you’ve got a little surprise coming.”

He took the shares, counted them, “A hundred eighty thousand Marks.”

He reviewed them, “One hundred thousand for your mother–the rest for you! Now pay attention!”

He picked up the telephone receiver, asked to be connected to the Shaffhausen Trust Company and requested to speak with one of the directors.

“Hello,” he barked. “Is that you, Friedberg?–A little favor, I have a few Burberger shares here–what can I get for them?”

A loud laughter rang out of the telephone and Herr Manasse joined in loudly.

“I thought so–” he cried out. “So they are absolutely worthless? What? They expect new funding next year–the best thing is to throw the entire lot away–well naturally!–A fraudulent investment that will certainly sooner or later loose everything? Thank you, Herr Director, excuse me for disturbing you!”

He hung up the phone and turned grimly to Frank Braun. “So now you know. And now you are wearing exactly that stupid face that your kindly uncle expected–excuse me for telling the truth! But leave the shares with me–it is possible that one of the other mining companies will take some interest in them and offer you a couple hundred Marks. Then we can buy a few bottles of wine with it and celebrate.”

Before Frank Braun had come back the greatest difficulty had constituted the almost daily negotiations with the large Mülheim Credit Bank. The bank had dragged on from week to week with exceptional effort, remembering the Privy Councilor’s solemn promise of assistance, always in the hope of receiving some small portion of help from his heiress.

With heroic courage the Directors, the Gentlemen from the Board of Directors, and the auditors managed to keep the leaky ship above water, always aware that the slightest new impact might cause it to capsize.

With the help of the bank, his Excellency had successfully concluded many very risky speculations. To him the bank had been a bright fountain of gold. But the bank’s own undertakings, which it had taken at the Privy Councilor’s suggestion, were all failing–Really his own fortune was no longer in danger, but that of the Princess Wolkonski was, along with those of several other wealthy investors.

This included the savings of a great number of little people as well, penny speculators that had followed the star of his Excellency. The legal

executors of the Privy Councilor's estate had promised their help, as much as it was in their power to do. But the hands of Legal Councilor Gontram, as provisional guardian, were tied by law–through the Chancery court–Money held in trust was sacred–all of it!

Really, there had been only one possibility, Manasse had found it. They could declare the Fräulein ten Brinken of age. Then she would be free to fulfill her father's moral obligations. For that purpose all of the parties worked together, pulling every last penny out of their own pockets. Already, with the last of their strength they had successfully survived a run on the bank that had lasted fourteen days–The decision had to be made now.

Until then the Fräulein had shook her head. Now she listened quietly to what the gentlemen were proposing, smiled, and said, "No."

"Why should I become of age?" she asked. "I like the way it is right now–and why should I give money away to save a bank that is absolutely of no concern to me at all?"

The Chancery Judge gave her a long speech about preserving the honor of her father. Everyone knew that he alone was the cause of their present difficulties–it was her duty as his child to clear his good name.

Alraune laughed in his face, "His good name?"

She turned around to Attorney Manasse: "Tell me, what do you think of it?"

Manasse didn't answer, curled up in his chair, spat and hissed like a stepped on Tomcat.

"Not much more than I do, it appears!" said the Fräulein. "And I won't give a penny for it."

Commercial Councilor Lützman, chairman of the Board of Directors, proposed that she should have some consideration for the old princess, who for so long had been an intimate friend of the house of Brinken. What about all of the little people that would lose all of their hard-earned money?

“Why did they speculate?” she replied calmly. “Why did they put their money into such a dubious bank? If I wanted to give to charity I know of better ways.”

Her logic was clear and cruel, like a sharp knife. She knew her father, she said, and whoever invested in the same things he did was certainly not very much better.

But it was not about charity, the Director returned. It was almost certain that the bank would hold together with her help, if it could only get over this current crisis she would get her money back, every penny of it and with interest.

She turned to the Chancery Judge.

“Your Honor,” she asked, “is there a risk involved?”

Naturally unforeseen circumstances could always come up. He had the professional duty to tell her–but as a human being he could only add his urgent plea to that of the other gentlemen. She would be doing a great and good work, saving the livelihoods of multitudes and the possibility of loss in his opinion was ever so slight.

She stood up, interrupted him quickly.

“Well then, gentlemen. There is a risk,” she cried mockingly, “and I don’t want to take any risk. I don’t want to save any livelihoods and have no desire to do great and good works.”

She nodded lightly to the gentlemen, left, leaving them sitting with fat, red little heads.

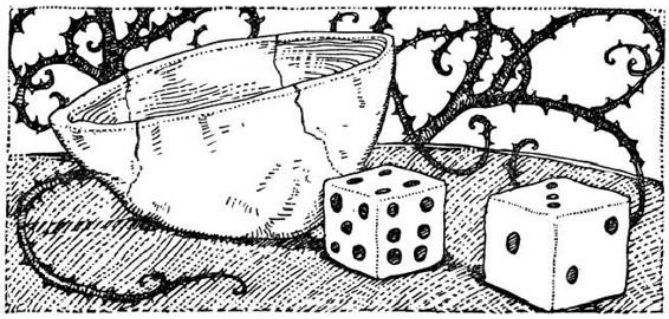
But still the bank continued, still battled on. Hope formed anew when the Legal Councilor informed them that Frank Braun; the true Guardian had arrived. The gentlemen immediately got in contact with him, arranged a conference for the next day.

Frank Braun saw very well that he would not be able to leave as quickly as he had believed. So he wrote his mother.

The old Frau read his letter, folded it carefully, and laid it in the large black trunk that contained all of his letters. She opened them on long winter evenings when she was completely alone. Then she read to her brown little hound what he had written to her.

She went out onto the balcony, looked down at the high chestnut trees that carried glowing candles in their mighty arms, looked down on the white blooming trees of the monastery under which brown monks quietly wandered.

“When will he come, my dear boy?” she thought.



Chapter Thirteen

Mentions how Princess Wolkonski told Alraune the truth.

LEGAL Councilor Gontram wrote the princess, who was in Naulhiem undergoing medical treatment. He described the situation to her. It took some time until she finally understood what it was really all about.

Frieda Gontram, herself, took great pains to make sure the princess comprehended everything. At first she only laughed, then she became thoughtful, and toward the end she lamented and screamed. When her daughter entered the room she threw her arms around her neck wailing.

“Poor child,” she howled. “We are beggars. We will be living on the streets!”

Then she poured heaps of caustic Eastern wrath over his dead Excellency, sparing no obscene swear words.

“It’s not entirely that bad,” Frieda objected. “You will still have your villa in Bonn and your little castle on the Rhine, also the proceeds from your Hungarian vineyards. Then Olga will have her Russian pension and–”

“One can’t live on that!” the old princess interrupted. “We will starve to death!”

“We must try to change the Fräulein’s mind,” Frieda said, “like father advises us!”

“He is an ass,” she cried. “An old scoundrel! He is in league with the Privy Councilor, who has stolen from us! It was only through him that I ever met that ugly swindler.”

She thought that all men were imposters, cheats and scoundrels. She had still never met one that was any different. Take Olga's husband for example, that clean cut Count Abrantes–Hadn't he carried on the entire time with dirty music hall women, taking all of her money that he could? Now he was living with a circus bareback rider because the Privy Councilor had put his thumb down and refused to give him any more–

"In that, his Excellency did do some good!" said the countess.

"Good!" screamed her mother–as if it didn't matter who had stolen the money!

"They are swine, the one just as much as the other."

But she did see that they had to make an attempt. She wanted to go herself, yet the other two talked her out of it. If she went there she would certainly not achieve much more than the gentlemen from the bank.

They had to proceed very diplomatically, declared Frieda, take into consideration the moods and caprices of the Fräulein. She would go by herself, that would be best. Olga thought it would be even better if she went. The old princess objected, but Frieda declared it would certainly not be very good if she interrupted her medical treatments and got too excited. She could see that.

So both friends agreed and traveled together. The princess stayed at the spa, but was not idle. She went to the priest, ordered a hundred masses for the poor soul of the Privy Councilor.

"That is the Christian thing to do," she thought and since her deceased husband was Russian Orthodox, she went to the Russian chapel and paid that priest for a hundred masses as well. That calmed her very much.

At one point she thought it would scarcely be of any use because his Excellency had been protestant and a free thinker as well. But then it would count as an especially good work in her favor.

“Bless them that curse you.” “Love your enemies.” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Oh, they must surely recognize such things up there, and twice a day in her prayers, she spoke a special plea for his Excellency–with very intense fervor. In this way she bribed the love of God.

Frank Braun received the two ladies at Lendenich, led them up to the terrace and chatted with them about old times.

“Try your luck, children,” he said. “My talking was of no use!”

“What did she say to you?” asked Frieda Gontram.

“Not much,” he laughed. “She didn’t even listen to all of it. She made a deep curtsy and declared with a devilish grin that she completely treasured the high honor of my guardianship and would not even consider ending it for the sake of the princess. She added that she did not wish to speak of it again. Then she curtsied again, even more deeply, even more respectfully–and she disappeared!”

“Haven’t you made a second attempt?” asked the countess.

“No, Olga,” he said. “I must now leave that to you–her look as she left was so determined that I am solidly convinced all my persuasive skills would be just as unfruitful as that of the other gentlemen.”

He stood up, rang for the servant to bring some tea.

“By the way, you ladies just might have a chance,” he continued. “A half hour after the Legal Councilor called giving notice of your arrival I told my cousin that you would be coming and why. I was afraid she would not receive you at all and in any case wanted you to have a chance.

But I was wrong. She declared that you were both very welcome, that for months now she has been in very active correspondence with both of you–that is why–”

Frieda Gontram interrupted him.

“You wrote to her?” she cried sharply.

Countess Olga stammered, “I–I–have written her a couple of times–to offer my condolences–and–and–”

“You lie!” Frieda cried.

The countess sprang up at that, “What about you? Don’t you write her? I knew that you were doing it, every two days you write to her. That’s why you are always alone in your room for so long.”

“You’ve had the chambermaid spy on me!” Frieda accused.

The glares of the two friends crossed each other, throwing a burning hate that was sharper than words. They understood each other completely.

For the first time the countess felt that she was not going to do what her friend requested and Frieda Gontram sensed this first resistance against her authority.

But they were bound through long years of their lives, through so many common memories–that it couldn’t be extinguished in an instant.

Frank Braun noticed right away.

“I’m disturbing you,” he said. “By the way, Alraune will be coming soon. She just wanted to get ready.”

He went to the garden stairs, then gave his regards.

“I will see you ladies again later.”

The friends said nothing. Olga sat in a cane easy chair. Frieda paced up and down with large strides. Then she stopped and stood right in front of her friend.

“Listen Olga,” she said softly. “I have always helped you, when we were serious and when we were playing, through all of your adventures and love affairs. Isn’t that true?”

The countess nodded, “Yes, but I have done exactly the same thing for you, not any less.”

“As well as you could,” spoke Frieda Gontram. “I will gladly admit it–we want to remain friends then?”

“Certainly!” cried Countess Olga. “Only–only–I’m not asking that much!”

“What are you asking?” inquired the other.

She answered, “Don’t put any obstacles in my way!”

“Obstacles?” Frieda returned. “Obstacles to what? Each of us should try our luck–like I already told you at the Candlemas ball!”

“No,” insisted the countess. “I don’t want to compete any more. I’ve competed with you so often–and always drawn the short straw. It is unequal–for that reason you will withdraw this time, if you love me.”

“Why is it unequal?” cried Frieda Gontram. “It’s even in your favor–you are more beautiful!”

“Yes,” her friend replied. “But that is nothing. You are more clever and I have often learned through experience how that is worth more–in these things.”

Frieda Gontram took her hand.

“Come Olga, she said, flattering her. “Be reasonable. We are not here just because of our feelings–listen to me. If I can succeed in getting the little Fräulein to change her mind, if I can save those millions for you and your mother–will you then give me a free hand?–Go into the garden, leave me alone with her.”

Large tears marched out of the eyes of the countess.

“I can’t,” she whispered. “Let me speak with her. I will gladly give you the money–this is only a sudden whim of yours.”

Frieda sighed out loud, threw herself into the chaise lounge, sank her slender fingers deeply into the silk cushions.

“A whim?–Do you believe I would make such a fuss over a whim?–With me, I’m afraid, it appears to be not much different than it is with you!”

Her features appeared rigid; her clear eyes stared out into emptiness.

Olga looked at her, sprang up, knelt down in front of her friend, who bowed her head down low over her. Their hands found each other and they tightly pressed themselves against each other, their tears quietly mingled together.

“What should we do?” asked the Countess.

“Withdraw!” said Frieda Gontram sharply. “Withdraw–both of us–let what happens, happen!”

Countess Olga nodded, pressing herself tightly against her friend.

“Stand up,” whispered the other. “Here she comes. Quick, dry your tears–here, take my handkerchief.”

Olga obeyed, went across to the other side.

But Alraune ten Brinken saw very clearly what had just happened. She stood in the large doorway, in black tights like the merry prince from “The Fledermaus”. She gave a short bow, greeted them and kissed the hands of the ladies.

“Don’t cry, it makes your beautiful little eyes cloudy.”

She clapped her hands together, called for the servant to bring some champagne. She, herself, filled the goblets, handed them to the ladies and urged them to drink.

“It is the custom here,” she trilled. “Each to their own taste.”

She led Countess Olga to a chaise lounge and caressed her entire arm. Then she sat down next to Frieda and gave her a slow, smiling glance. She stayed in her role, offered cakes and petit fours, poured drops of Peáu d'Espagne out of her golden vial onto the ladies handkerchiefs.

Then she began, "Yes, it's true. It is very sad that I can't help you. I'm so sorry."

Frieda Gontram straightened up, opened her lips with great difficulty.

"And why not?" she asked.

"I have no reason at all," answered Alraune. "Really none at all!–I simply don't want to–that is all."

She turned to the Countess, "Do you believe your Mama will suffer very much because of that?"

She stressed the "very"–and in doing so, her voice twittered sweet and cruel at the same time like a swallow on the hunt. The countess trembled under her gaze.

"Oh, no!" she said. "Not that much.

And she repeated Frieda's words–

"She will still have her villa in Bonn and the little castle on the Rhine. Then there were the proceeds from the Hungarian vineyards. I also have my Russian pension and–"

She stopped, didn't know any more. She had no concept of her financial standing, scarcely knew what money was, only that you could go into beautiful shops and buy things with it, hats and other pretty things. There would be more than enough to do that.

She excused herself primly; it had only been a thought of her mother's. There was no need for the Fräulein to trouble herself over it. She only hoped that the unpleasant incident hadn't brought any stormy clouds into their friendship–She chatted on without stopping to think, senseless and

pointless. She didn’t catch the severe glance of her friend and crouched warmly under the green glowing eyes of Fräulein ten Brinken, like a wild forest rabbit in a cabbage patch.

Frieda Gontram became restless. At first she was angered at the immense stupidity of her friend, then found her manner tasteless and laughable.

“No fly,” she thought, “ever flew so clumsily to the poisoned sugar.”

But finally, the more Olga chatted under Alraune’s gaze, the more quickly her own sulking feelings awoke under their normal covering of snow and she tried very hard to repress them. Her gaze wandered across, fastened itself passionately on the slender body of Prince Orlowski.

Alraune noticed it.

“I thank you, dear Countess,” she said. “What you’ve told me relieves me very much.”

She turned toward Frieda Gontram, “The Legal Councilor has told me such horror stories about the certain ruin of the princess!”

Frieda searched for a last reserve and gave herself a violent shake.

“My father is right,” she declared bluntly. “Naturally the collapse is unavoidable–The princess will have to sell her little castle–”

“Oh, that doesn’t matter,” declared the countess. “We are never there anyway!”

“Be quiet,” cried Frieda. Her eyes clouded, she felt that she was entirely, without a doubt, fighting for a lost cause.

“The princess will have to rent out rooms in her household, will have difficulty adjusting to her new life style. It is doubtful if she will be able to keep her car, most likely not.”

“What a shame!” piped the black prince.

“She will also have to sell her horses and carriages,” Frieda continued. “Most of the servants will have to be let go–”

Alraune interrupted her, “What will you do Fräulein Gontram? Will you stay with the princess?”

She hesitated at the question, it was totally unexpected.

“I,” she stammered, “I–but most certainly–”

At that Fräulein ten Brinken piped up, “Of course it would make me very happy if I were permitted to invite you to my house. I am so alone. I need company–come to me.”

Frieda fought, wavered a moment.

“To you–Fräulein–?”

But Olga stepped between them, “No, no! She must stay with us!–She is not allowed to leave my mother now.”

“I was never at your mother’s,” declared Frieda Gontram. “I was with you.”

“That doesn’t matter!” cried the countess. “With me or with her–I don’t want you to stay here!”

“Oh, pardon me,” mocked Alraune. “I believed the Fräulein had a will of her own!”

Countess Olga stood up, all of the blood drained from her face.

“No,” she screamed. “No, no!”

“I take no one that doesn’t come of their own free will,” laughed the prince. “That is my mark. I will not even urge–Stay with the princess if you really want to Fräulein Gontram.”

She stepped up closer to her, grasped both of her hands.

“Your brother was my good friend,” she said slowly, “and my playmate–I often kissed him–”

She saw how this woman, almost twice her age, dropped her eyes under her gaze, felt how her hands became moist under the lightest touch of her fingers. She drank in this victory. It was priceless.

“Will you stay here?” she whispered.

Frieda Gontram breathed heavily. Without looking up she stepped over to the countess.

“Forgive me Olga,” she said. “I must stay.”

At that her friend threw herself onto the sofa, buried her face in the pillows. Her body was wracked with hysterical sobbing.

“No,” she lamented. “No, no!”

She stood up, raised her hand as if to strike her friend, then burst out into shrill laughter. She ran down the stairs into the garden, without a hat, without a parasol, across the courtyard and out into the street.

“Olga,” her friend cried after her. “Olga!–Listen to me! Olga!”

But Fräulein ten Brinken said, “Let her be. She will calm down soon enough.”

Her haughty voice rang–

Frank Braun breakfasted outside in the garden under the elder tree. Frieda Gontram gave him his tea.

“It is certainly good for this house,” he said, “that you are here. One never sees you doing anything, but everything runs like clockwork. The servants have a strange dislike of my cousin and have fallen into a passive resistance. The people have no idea of class warfare, but they have already reached a point of sabotage. An open revolution would have broken out

long ago if they didn’t have a bit of love for me. Now you are in the house– and suddenly everything runs by itself–I give you my compliments Frieda!”

“Thank you,” she replied. “I am happy that I can do something for Alraune.”

“Only,” he continued, “you are missed all the more over there. Everything has gone topsy-turvy since the bank has stopped payments. Here, read my mail!”

He pushed a few letters over to her. But Frieda Gontram shook her head.

“No– excuse me–I don’t want to read, don’t want to know anything about it.”

He insisted, “You must know, Frieda. If you don’t want to read the letters, I will give you the short version. Your friend has been found–”

“Is she alive,” whispered Frieda.

“Yes, she’s alive!” he declared. “When she ran away from here she got lost and wandered around through the entire night and the next day. At first she must have gone inland toward the mountains, then curved back to the Rhine.

People on a ferryboat saw her not far from Remagen. They watched her and stayed nearby. Her behavior seemed suspicious and when she jumped from the cliff they steered over to her and fished her out of the river after a few minutes. That was about noon, four days ago. They brought her struggling and fighting to the local jail.”

Frieda Gontram held her head in both arms.

“To jail?” she asked softly.

“Certainly,” he answered. “Where else could they have taken her? It was obvious that she would immediately try to commit suicide again if they let her go free–So she was taken into custody.

She refused to give any information and remained stubbornly silent. She had long since thrown away her watch, purse and even her handkerchief–No one could make any sense out of the crown and the initials in her linen undergarments. It was only when your father reported her missing to the authorities that they were able to figure it out and establish her identity for certain."

"Where is she?" asked Frieda.

"In the city," he replied. "The Legal Councilor picked her up from Remagen and brought her to Professor Dalberg's private insane asylum. Here is his report–I fear that Countess Olga will need to stay there for a very long time. The princess arrived yesterday evening–Frieda, you should visit your poor friend soon. The professor says that she is quiet and calm."

Frieda Gontram stood up.

"No, no." she cried. "I can't."

She went slowly down the gravel path under the fragrant lilacs. Frank Braun watched her go. Her face was like a marble mask, like fate had chiseled it out of hard stone. Then suddenly a smile fell on that cold mask, like a ray of sunshine reaching deep into the shadows. Her eyelids raised, her eyes searched through the red beech lined avenue that led up to the mansion–Then he heard Alraune's clear laughter.

"Her power is strange," he thought. "Uncle Jakob really had it right in his leather bound volume of musings."

He thought about it. Oh yes, it was difficult for Frieda to be away from her. No one knew what is was, and yet they all still flew into her hot burning flame–What about him? Him as well?

There was something that attracted him, that was certain. He didn't understand how it worked, on his senses, on his blood or perhaps on his brain–But it did work, he knew that very well. It was not true that he was still here because of the lawsuits and settlements alone. Now that the case

of the Mühlheim bank had been decided, he could easily finish everything up with the help of the attorney–without personally being here.

And yet he was here–still here. He was pretending, lying to himself, skillfully creating new reasons, protracting the lengthy negotiations as much as possible, in order to put off his departure. And it seemed that his cousin noticed it as well. Yes, even as if her quiet influence made him act that way.

“I will go back home tomorrow,” he thought.

Then the thought sprang out from the nape of his neck, “Why should he? Was he afraid of something? Did he fear this delicate child? Was he infected by the foolishness that his uncle had written down in his leather bound volume? What could happen? In the worst case a little adventure! Certainly not his first–and scarcely his last! Was he not an equal opponent, perhaps even superior? Didn’t bodies lie along the life’s path that his feet had trod as well? Why should he flee?

He created her once, he, Frank Braun. It had been his idea and his uncle had only been the instrument. She was his creation–much more than she was that of his Excellency. He had been young at the time, foaming like new wine, full of bizarre dreams, full of heaven storming fantasies. He had played catch with the stars and from them had captured this strange fruit from out of the dark, wild primeval forest of the inscrutable where his steps had led him.

He had found a good gardener that he had given the fruit to. The gardener had planted the seed into the earth, watered it, looked after the seedling and tended the young little tree. Now he was back and there shone his blossoming tree.

Certainly, it was poisonous; whoever rested under it encountered its toxic breath. Many died of it–many that strolled in its sweet fragrance–the clever gardener that cared for it as well.

But he was not the gardener that loved this strange blossoming little tree more than anything else, not one of the unknowing people that

wandered into the garden by chance. He was the one that had first plucked the fruit that contained the seed from which it grew.

Since then he had ridden many days through the savage forest of the inscrutable, waded deeply through the sweltering, fever infested swamp of the incomprehensible. His soul had breathed many hot poisons there, been touched by pestilence and the smoke of many cruel burning sins.

Oh yes, it had hurt a lot, tormented him and ripped open puss filled ulcers–But it didn't throw him. He always rode away healthy under heaven's protection–Now he was safe, as if wearing armor of blue steel.

Oh, certainly he was immune–There would be no battle, now it appeared to him more like a game. But then–if it was only a game–he should go–wasn't that true? If she was only a doll that was dangerous for all the others, but a harmless plaything in his own strong hands–Then the adventure would be too cheap. Only–if it really were a battle, one with equally powerful weapons–only then would it be worth the effort.

Fraud! He thought again. Who was he really kidding about his heroic deeds? Hadn't his victories often enough been easy and certain?–More like episodes? No, this was not any different that it always was. Could you ever know the real strength of your opponent? Wasn't the sting of the poisonous little wasp far more dangerous than the crocodile like jaws of the caiman that goes up against the certainty of his Winchester rifle?

He found no way out, ran around in circles, getting himself confused as well. But he always came back to the same point, stay!

"Good morning, cousin," laughed Alraune ten Brinken.

She stood right in front of him, next to Frieda Gontram.

"Good morning," he answered curtly. "Read these letters here–It won't do you any harm to think about what you have been the cause of–It's time to stop this foolishness, do something sensible, something worth the effort."

She looked at him sharply.

“Really?” she said, drawing each word out slowly. “And just what is it that you think would be worth my effort?”

He didn’t respond–Didn’t have any answer at the moment.

He stood up, shrugged his shoulders and went into the garden. Her laughter sounded behind him.

“In a bad mood, Herr Guardian?”

That afternoon he sat in the library. Some documents lay in front of him that Attorney Manasse had sent over yesterday. But he didn’t read them. He stared into the air, hurriedly smoking one cigarette after the other.

Then he opened a desk drawer and once more took out the Privy Councilor’s leather bound volume. He read slowly and carefully, considering every little incident.

There was a knock; the chauffeur quickly stepped inside.

“Herr Doctor,” he cried. “Princess Wolkonski is here. She is very upset, screamed for the Fräulein while she was still in her carriage. We thought that perhaps it might be better if you received her first–So Aloys is bringing her here right now.”

“Well done!” he said. He sprang up and went to meet the princess. With great effort she squeezed through the narrow door and waltzed her heavy masses into the half darkened hall, which was lit only by the sparse sunlight that came through the green Venetian blinds.

“Where is she?” she panted. “Where is the Fräulein?”

He took her hand and led her over to the divan. She recognized him immediately and called him by name, but had no intention of getting into a conversation with him.

“I want to see Fräulein Alraune,” she cried. “Bring the Fräulein here!”

She would not calm down until he rang the servant and instructed him to announce the visit of the princess. Then, for the first time, she consented to listen to him.

He asked after the health of her child and the princess related to him, in an immense flood of words, how she had met with her daughter. Not once had she recognized her own mother, had simply sat by the window looking out into the garden, passive and listless.

It had been in the old Privy Councilor's clinic, that fraud, which Professor Dalberg had now turned into an insane asylum, the same building where–

He interrupted her, cutting short her flood of words. He quickly grabbed her hand, bent over it and looked with simulated interest at her rings.

"Excuse me, your Highness," he cried quickly. "Where did you ever get this marvelous emerald? Definitely a showcase piece!"

"It was a button from the Magnate's beret of my first husband," she replied. "It's an old heirloom."

She prepared to continue her tirade, but he didn't let her get a word in.

"It is a stone of uncommon purity!" he affirmed. "And of remarkable size! I only once saw a similar one, in the royal stud of the Maharajah of Rolinkore–He had it set into his favorite horse's left eye. For the right it carried a Burmese ruby that was only a little smaller."

Then he told of the hobby of Indian princes, how they gouged out the eyes of their beautiful horses and replaced them with glass eyes or large round highly polished stones.

"It sounds cruel," he said. "But I assure you, your Highness. The effect is amazing when you see such a magnificent animal, when they stare at you with Alexandrite eyes, or glance at you out of deep blue sapphires."

Then he spoke of precious stones, remembering from his student days that she knew quite a bit about jewels and pearls. It was the only thing she was really interested in. She gave him answers, at first quickly and briefly, then became calmer with every minute.

She pulled off her rings, showed them to him one after the other, telling him a little story about each one. He nodded attentively.

“Now let my cousin come,” he thought. “The first storm is over.”

But he was wrong. Alraune had soundlessly come through the door, walked softly across the carpet and set herself down in the easy chair right across from them.

“I am so happy to see you, your Highness,” she piped.

The princess cried out and gasped for breath, crossed herself, then a second time, in the Orthodox manner.

“There she is,” she moaned. “There she sits!”

“Yes,” laughed Alraune, “alive and breathing!”

She stood up and reached her hand out to the princess.

“I am so sorry,” she continued. “My sympathies, your Highness!”

The princess didn’t take her hand. She was speechless for a minute, struggled for composure–Then she found herself again.

“I don’t need your sympathy!” she cried. “I have something to say to you!”

Alraune sat back down, waved lightly with her hand.

“Please speak, your Highness.”

The princess began. Did the Fräulein know that she had lost her fortune through the machinations of his Excellency? But yes, naturally she

knew. The gentlemen had explained every detail to her, explained what she had to do–But she had refused to fulfill her obligation.

Did she know what had happened to her daughter? She explained how she had found her in the asylum and what the doctor's opinion was. She became more excited, her voice swelled, becoming higher and more shrieking.

She knew all of that, declared Alraune calmly.

The princess asked, what was she now intending to do? Did she intend to walk in the same dirty footsteps of her father? Oh, there was a fine scoundrel. You couldn't find a finer or more cunning blackguard in any book. Now he had his just reward.

She continued screaming and yelling about his Excellency, saying everything that came to her tongue–She screamed that Olga's sudden attack had been because of the failure of her mission and not wanting to come back. Alraune had made things worse by enticing her friend of many long years away from her.

She believed that if the Fräulein would now help, not only would her fortune be saved, but her child as well, when she heard the news.

'I'm not asking," she screamed. "I'm demanding! I demand what is rightfully mine. You have done this wrong, you, my own Godchild, and your father. Now make it right again, as much as you possibly can–It is a shame that I must be the first to tell you this–But you will have it no other way."

"What is there left to save?" Alraune said softly. "As far as I know, the bank collapsed three days ago. Your money is gone, your Highness!"

She stressed the 'gone'–You could hear the bank notes fluttering in all directions.

"That doesn't matter," declared the princess. "The Legal Councilor told me that almost twelve million of my money was invested into that

rotten bank. You will simply give me those twelve million out of your own money. That will be nothing to you–I know that very well!”

“Is that all?” said Fräulein ten Brinken. “Are there any more commands, your Highness!”

“Many more,” cried the princess. “You will inform Fräulein Gontram that she is to leave your house immediately. She will go with me to my poor daughter. I promised to bring her along the next time I came. Especially now, so she can share the news that this sad misfortune has been made right. It will have a very good effect on the countess–Perhaps a sudden recovery.

I won’t reproach Fräulein Gontram in any way over her ungrateful behavior or continue pointing out your own behavior to you. I only wish this affair to be settled immediately.”

She fell silent, took a deep breath after the tremendous exertion of her long speech. She took her handkerchief, fanned herself, and wiped the thick drops of sweat that beaded on her bright red face.

Alraune stood up briefly, made a slight bow.

“Your Highness is too gracious,” she piped.

Then she remained quiet.

The princess waited awhile, then finally asked, “Well?”

“Well?” the Fräulein came back in the same tone of voice.

“I’m waiting, –” cried the princess.

“So am I, – ” said Alraune.

Princess Wolkonski moved back and forth on the divan, whose old springs sagged heavily under her weight. The way she was pressed into her mighty corset, which even now formed the huge masses into some type of

shape, made it difficult for her to breath or even move. Her breath came short and unconsciously her thick tongue licked her dry lips.

“May I be permitted to have a glass of water brought for you, your Highness?” twittered the Fräulein.

She acted as if she had not heard.

“What do you intend to do now?” she asked solemnly.

Alraune spoke with infinite simplicity, “Absolutely nothing.”

The old princess stared at her with round cow eyes, as if she could not comprehend what the young thing meant. She stood up, confused, took a few steps, looked around as if she were searching for something.

Frank Braun stood up, took the carafe of water from the table, filled a glass and gave it to her. She drank it greedily.

Alraune stood up as well.

“I beg to be excused, your Highness,” she said. “May I be permitted to convey your greetings to Fräulein Gontram?”

The princess went up to her, seething, full of repressed anger.

Now she is going to burst, thought Frank Braun.

But she couldn’t find the words, searched in vain for a beginning.

“Tell her,” she panted. “Tell her that I never want to lay eyes on her again! She is no better a woman than you are!”

She stamped with heavy steps through the hall, gasping, sweating, and waving her mighty arms in the air. Then her glance fell on the open drawer. She saw the necklace that she had once given her Godchild, a gold chain with pearls and set with diamonds around the fiery lock of the mother’s hair. A triumphant look of hatred flew over her bloated features. She quickly tore the necklace out of the drawer.

“Do you know what this is?” she screamed.

“No,” said Alraune calmly. “I’ve never seen it before.”

The princess stepped up right in front of her.

“So that scoundrel of a Privy Councilor embezzled it from you–just like him! It was my present to you, Alraune, as my god-child!”

“Thank you,” said the Fräulein. “The pearls are very pretty, and the diamonds too–if they are real.”

“They are real,” screamed the princess. “Like this hair that I cut from your mother!”

She threw the necklace into the Fräulein’s lap. Alraune took the unusual piece of jewelry, weighed it thoughtfully in her hand.

“My–mother?” she said slowly. “It appears that my mother had very beautiful hair.”

The princess placed herself solidly in front of her, putting both hands solidly on her hips. She was matter of fact, like a washerwoman.

“Very beautiful hair,” she laughed. “Very beautiful! So beautiful that all the men ran after her and paid an entire Mark for one night’s sleep with her beautiful hair!”

The Fräulein sprang up. The blood drained out of her face in an instant, but she quickly laughed again and said calmly and scornfully:

“You are getting old, your Highness, old and childish.”

That was the end. Now there was no going back for the princess. She broke loose with ordinary, infinitely vulgar language like a drunken Bordello Madam. She screamed, howled and obscene filth poured out of her mouth.

lraune’s mother was a whore, one of the lowest kind, who gave herself away for a Mark and her father was a miserable rapist and murderer whose name was Noerrissen. She knew all about it. The Privy Councilor had paid the prostitute money and purchased her for his vile experiment, had inseminated her with the semen of the executed criminal. That was how Alraune had been created and she, herself, had injected the loathsome semen into Alraune’s mother.

She, Alraune, the stinking fruit of that experiment, was sitting there now–right in front of her!–A murderer’s daughter and a prostitute’s child!

That was her revenge. She went out triumphant, with light steps, swollen with the pride of a victory that made her ten years younger. She slammed the door loudly as she closed it.

Now it was quiet in the large library. Alraune sat in her chair, a little pale. Her hands played nervously with the necklace, faint movements played around the corners of her mouth. Finally she stood up.

“Stupid stuff,” she whispered.

She took a few steps, then calmed herself and stepped back up to her cousin.

“Is it true, Frank Braun?” she asked.

He hesitated a moment, stood up and said slowly:

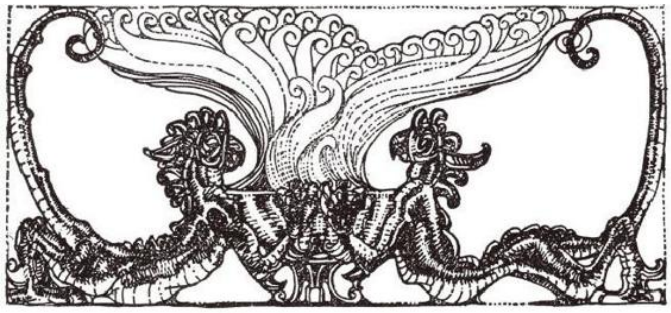
“I believe that it is true.”

He stepped over to the writing desk, took up the leather bound volume and handed it to her.

“Read this,” he said.

She didn’t speak a word, turned to go.

“Take this too,” he cried after her and handed her the dice cup that had been fashioned out of her mother’s skull and the dice that had been created out of her father’s bones.



Chapter Fourteen

Describes how Frank Braun played with fire and how Alraune awoke.

THAT evening the Fräulein didn’t come to dinner, only allowed Frieda Gontram to bring in a little tea and a few cakes. Frank Braun waited awhile for her, hoping that perhaps later she would come down. Then he went to the library and reluctantly took up the documents from the writing desk. But he couldn’t bring himself to read them, put them down again and decided to drive into the city.

Before he left he took the last little mementos from out of the desk drawer, the piece of silk curtain cord, the card and four-leaf clover with the bullet holes through them and finally the alraune manikin. He packed everything together, sealed the brown paper package and had it sent up to the Fräulein. He attached no written explanation to it–

Everything would be explained to her inside the leather bound volume that bore her initials.

Then he rang for the chauffeur and drove into the city. As he expected, he met Herr Manasse in the little wine pub on Cathedral Square. Stanislaus Schacht was with him. He sat down with them and began to chat.

He got into a deep discussion with the attorney about legal questions, debating the pros and cons of this and that lawsuit. They decided to turn a few of the doubtful cases over to the Legal Councilor for him alone. He would bring them to some acceptable compromise. Manasse believed that a victorious settlement could be reached with the others.

In some of the cases Frank Braun calmly suggested they simply acknowledge the claim, but Manasse refused.

“Never acknowledge–even if the opponent’s demands are as clear as day and justified a hundred-fold!”

He was the straightest and most honest attorney in the county courthouse, one that always told his clients the truth, right to their face. In front of the bar he might remain completely quiet but he would never lie–and yet he was way too much a lawyer not to have an innate hatred of recognizing an opponent’s claim.

“It only costs us more,” Frank Braun objected.

“So what!” barked the attorney. “What does that have to do with it?–I tell you, one never knows–there is always a chance…”

“A legal one–perhaps–” answered Frank Braun. “–but–”

He fell silent. There was no other way for the attorney. The Court determined justice–what ever it said was just, even how it decided. Today it would be just–and totally different after a couple of months in the higher courts. Nevertheless, the Court gave the final decision and it was sacred–not the parties involved.

To recognize a claim yourself, without such a decision, was usurping the right of the Court. As an attorney Manasse was partial to his own clients. He desired the judge to be impartial, so it was an abomination to him to make such a decision for his own party.

Frank Braun smiled.

“As you wish,” he said.

He spoke with Stanislaus Schacht, listened as this friend of Dr. Mohnen talked of all the others that had been there as students with him.

“Yes, Joseph Theyssen has been a Government Advisor for some time now and Klingel Hőffer is a professor at Halle–he will be the new chair for

Anatomy, and Fritz langen–and Bastian–and–”

Frank Braun listened, turned the pages of this living directory of German nobility that knew everyone.

“Are you still enrolled?” he asked.

Stanislaus fell silent, a little offended.

But the attorney barked, “What! Didn’t you know? He passed his doctoral exam–five years ago.”

“Really–five years ago!”

Frank Braun calculated backward, that must have been in his forty-fifth, no, forty-sixth semester.

“Well,” he said.

He stood up and reached out his hand, which the other heartily shook.

“Allow me to congratulate you, Herr Doctor!” he continued. “But–tell me–what are you doing now?”

“Yes, if he only knew!” cried the attorney.

Then chaplain Schrőder came. Frank Braun stood up to greet him–

“Back in the country again?” cried the black suited priest. “We must celebrate!”

“I am the host,” declared Stanislaus Schacht. “He must drink to my doctor’s degree.”

“And with me to my newly becoming a vicar,” laughed the priest. “Let’s share the honor then, if it’s alright with you, Dr. Schacht.”

They agreed and the white haired vicar ordered a 93 Scharzhofberger, which the wine pub had placed in stock on his recommendation. He tested

the wine, nodded with satisfaction and toasted with Frank Braun.

“You have it good,” he said, “sticking your nose into every unknown place on land and sea. Yes, we can read about them in the newspapers–but we must sit at home and console ourselves with the fact that the Mosel still always produces a good wine–You certainly can’t get this label out there!”

“We can get the label,” he said, “but not the wine– ow Herr Reverend, what have you been up to?”

“What should I be up to?” replied the priest. “One just gets themselves angry. Our old Rhine is always becoming more Prussian. But for relaxation one can write rotten pieces for the Tűnnes, Bestavader, Schâl, Speumanes and the Marizzebill. I have already plundered Plautus and Terence in their entirety for Peter Millowwitsch’s puppet theater in Cologne–Now I’m doing it to Holberg. And just think, that fellow–Herr Director, he calls himself today–now pays me royalties–Another one of those Prussian inventions.”

“Be happy about it!” growled Attorney Manasse. “By the way, he’s also published on Iamblicos.”

He turned to Frank Braun, “And I tell you, it is a very exceptional book.”

“Not worth talking about,” cried the old vicar. “Only a little attempt–”

Stanislaus Schacht interrupted him.

“Go on!” he said. “Your work lays out the foundation of the very essence of the Alexandrian school. Your hypothesis about the Emanation Doctrine of the Neo-Platonists–”

He went on, lecturing like an argumentative Bishop at the high council. Here and there he made of few considerations, gave his opinion, that it wasn’t right the author based his entire work on the three cosmic principles that had been previously established. Couldn’t he have just as well successfully included the “Spirit” of Pophyrs?”

Manasse joined in and finally the vicar as well. They argued as if there was nothing more important in the entire world than this strange monism of Alexander, which was based on nothing other than a mystical annihilation of self, of the “I”, through ecstasy, asceticism and theurgy.

Frank Braun listened silently.

“This is Germany,” he thought. “This is my country–”

It occurred to him that a year ago he had been sitting in a bar somewhere in Melbourne or Sidney–with him had been a Justice of the Supreme Court, a Bishop of the High Church and a famous doctor. They had disputed and argued no less ardently than these three that were now sitting with him–But it had been about whom was the better boxer, Jimmy Walsh of Tasmania or slender Fred Costa, the champion of New-South Wales.

But here sat a little attorney, who was still being passed over for promotion to Legal Councilor, a priest that wrote foolish pieces for a puppet theater, that had a few titles of his own, but never a parish, and finally the eternal student Stanislaus Schacht, who after some fourteen years was happy to have his doctor’s degree and now didn’t know what to do with himself.

And these three little poor wretches spoke about the most abstract, far-fetched things that had nothing at all to do with their occupations. And they spoke so easily, with the same familiarity as the gentlemen in Melbourne had conversed about a boxing match. Oh, you could sift through all of America and Australia, even nine-tenths of Europe–and you would not find such an abundance of knowledge–only–it was dead.

He sighed, it was long dead and reeked of decay–really, the gentlemen didn’t even notice!

He asked the vicar how it was going with his foster son, young Gontram. Immediately Attorney Manasse interrupted himself.

“Yes, tell us Herr Reverend–that’s why I came here. What does he write?”

Vicar Schröder unbuttoned his jacket, pulled out his wallet and took a letter out of it.

“Here, read for yourself,” he said. “It doesn’t sound very encouraging!”

He handed the envelope to the attorney. Frank Braun threw a quick glance at the postmark.

“From Davos?” he asked. “Did he inherit his mother’s fate as well?”

“Unfortunately,” sighed the old priest. “And he was such a fresh, good boy, that Josef. Absolutely not meant for the priesthood though. God only knows what he would have studied, or I would have allowed him to study if I didn’t wear the black robe. But I promised his mother on her deathbed. By the way, he has already gone as far in his studies as I have–I tell you–he passed his doctoral exam–summa cum laude! I obtained a special dispensation for him through the ArchBishop, who has always been very benevolent towards me personally.

He helped me a lot with the work about Iamblichos–yes, he could really become something! Only–unfortunately–”

He hesitated and slowly emptied his glass.

“Did it come so suddenly, Herr Reverend?” asked Frank Braun.

“You could say that,” answered the priest. “It first started with the psychological shock of the sudden death of his brother, Wolf. You should have seen him outside, at the cemetery. He never moved from my side while I gave my sermon, stared at the enormous garland of blood red roses that lay on the coffin. He held himself upright until the ceremony was ended, but then he felt so weak that Schacht and I had to downright carry him.

In the carriage he seemed better, but at home with me he once more became entirely apathetic–The only thing I could get out of him at all that entire evening was that now he was the last of the Gontram boys and it was his turn next. This apathy would not yield and from that hour he remained convinced that his days were numbered, even though a very thorough medical examination gave me a lot of hope in the beginning. But then it went rapidly. From day to day you could see his decline–now we have sent him to Davos–but it appears that his song will soon be over."

He fell silent, fat tears stood in his eyes–

"His mother was tougher," growled the attorney. "She laughed in the Reaper's face for six long years."

"God grant her soul eternal peace," said the vicar and he filled the glasses. "We will drink a silent toast to her–in her memory."

They raised the glasses and emptied them.

"The old Legal Councilor will soon be entirely alone," observed Dr. Schacht. "Only his daughter appears to be completely healthy–She is the only one that will survive him."

"The attorney grumbled, "Frieda?–No, I don't believe it."

"And why not?" asked Frank Braun.

"Because–because–" he began, "–well, why shouldn't I say it?"

He looked straight at Frank Braun, cutting, enraged, as if he wanted to take him by the throat.

"You want to know why Frieda Gontram will never grow old?–I will tell you. Because she is now completely caught in the claws–of that damned witch out there!–That's why–Now you know!"

"Witch," thought Frank Braun. "He calls her a witch, just like Uncle Jakob did in his leather bound volume."

“What do you mean by that, Herr Attorney?” he asked.

Manasse barked, “Exactly what I said. “Whoever gets to close to the Fräulein ten Brinken–gets stuck, like a fly in syrup. And whoever is once caught by her–stays there and no amount of struggling will do any good!

Be careful, Herr Doctor, I’m warning you! It is thankless enough–to give warnings like this. I have already done it once–without any success–with Wölfchen–now it is you–flee while there is still time. What do you still want here?–It seems to me exactly as if you are already licking at the honey!”

Frank Braun laughed–but it sounded a little forced.

“Have no fear on my account, Herr Attorney,” he cried–But he didn’t convince the other–and even less, himself.

They sat and drank, drank to Schacht’s doctoral degree and to the Priest’s becoming a vicar. They drank as well to the health of Karl Mohnen, of whom no one had heard since he had left the city.

“He is lost,” said Stanislaus Schacht.

Then he became sentimental and sang melancholy songs. Frank Braun took his leave, went out on foot back to Lendenich–through the fragrant trees of spring – like in the old times.

He came across the courtyard, then saw a light in the library. He went in–Alraune sat on the divan.

“You here, little cousin?” he greeted.

She didn’t answer, waved to him to take a place. He sat across from her, waiting. But she remained silent and he didn’t press her.

Finally she said, “I wanted to speak with you.”

He nodded, but she fell silent again.

“So,” he began, “did you read the leather bound volume?”

“Yes,” she said.

She took a deep breath, looked at him.

“So, am I only a joke that you once made, Frank Braun?”

“A joke?” he returned. “–An–idea, if you will–”

“And I suppose it was funny enough,” she laughed out loud. But that’s not why I waited here for you. I want to know something entirely different. Tell me. Do you believe it?”

“Do I believe what?” he answered. “If everything happened like Uncle relates in the leather bound volume? Yes, I believe that.”

She shook her head impatiently. “No, that’s not what I mean. Naturally that is true–why would he lie in his book?–I want to know whether you also believe–like my–my–that is–your uncle did–That I am a different type of creature, different from other people, that I–am now, that I am, what my name implies?”

“How shall I reply to your question?” he said. “Ask any medical doctor–he will certainly say that you are just as good a human being as anyone else in the world, even if your first appearance was a little unusual–He would add, that all the other details are pure coincidence and unimportant, the–”

“That means nothing to me,” she interrupted.

“For your uncle these little details were most important. Basically it doesn’t matter if they are or not. I want to know if you share his opinion? Do you believe as well that I am a strange creature?”

He remained silent, searched for a reply, didn’t know how he should respond. He did believe it–and then again he didn’t–

“You see–” he began finally.

“Speak,” she urged. “Do you believe that I am your insolent joke–that took form? Your idea, which the old Privy Councilor threw into his crucible, which he cooked and distilled, until something came out that now sits before you?”

This time he didn’t hesitate, “If you put it that way, yes, that’s what I believe.”

She laughed softly, “I thought so–and that’s why I waited up for you tonight. To cure you of this vanity as soon as possible. No, cousin. You didn’t throw this idea into the world, not you–not any more than the old Privy Councilor did.”

He didn’t understand her.

“Then who did?” he asked.

She reached under the pillow with her hand.

“This did!” she cried.

She lightly tossed the little alraune into the air and caught it again, caressed it lovingly with nervous fingers.

“That there? Why that?” he asked.

She gave back, “Did you think about it earlier–before the day the Legal Councilor celebrated the communion of the two children?”

“No,” he replied. “Certainly not.”

But then this thing fell down from the wall, that was when the idea came to you! Isn’t that true?”

“Yes,” he confessed. “That is how it was.”

“Now then,” she continued, “so the idea came from outside somewhere and entered into you. It was when Attorney Manasse gave his lecture, when he recited like a school book and explained to all of you what

this little alraune was and what it meant–That's when the idea grew in your brain. It became so large and so strong that you found the strength to suggest it to your uncle, to persuade him to carry it out, to create me.

Then, if I am only an idea that came into the world and took on human form, it is also true that you, Frank Braun, were only an agent, an instrument–no more than the Privy Councilor or his assistant doctor. No different than–"

She hesitated, fell silent, but only for a moment. Then she continued–

"than the prostitute, Alma and the rapist-murderer whom you all coupled–you and Death!"

She laid the little alraune on the silk cushions, looked at it with an almost loving glance and said," You are my father: You are my mother. You are what created me."

He looked at her.

"Perhaps it was so," he thought.

Ideas whirl through the air, like the pollen from flowers and play around before finally sinking into someone's brain. Often they waste away there, spoil and die–Only a few find good rich soil–

"Perhaps she was right," he thought.

His brain had always been a fertile planting place for all kinds of foolishness and abstruse fantasies. It seemed the same to him, whether he was the one that once threw the seed of this idea into the world–or whether he was the fertile earth that had received it.

But he remained silent, left her with her thought. He glanced over at her, a child, playing with her doll. She slowly stood up, not letting the little manikin out of her hands.

"There is something else I want to tell you," she spoke softly. "But first I want to thank you for it, for giving me the leather bound volume and

not burning it.

“What is it?” he asked.

She interrupted herself.

“Should I kiss you?” she asked. “I could kiss–”

“Was that all you wanted to say, Alraune?” he said.

She replied, “No, not that!–I only thought I would like to kiss you once. Just in case–But first I want to tell you this, why I waited. Go away!”

He bit his lips, “Why?”

“Because–because it would be better,” she answered, “for you–perhaps for me as well. But it doesn’t depend on that–I now know how things are–am now enlightened, and I think that things will continue to go as they have–only, I will not be running around blindly anymore–Now I see everything. Soon–soon it will be your turn, and that’s why it would be better if you left.”

“Are you so certain of this?” he asked.

“Don’t I need to be?”

He shrugged his shoulders, “Perhaps, I don’t know. But tell me, why do you want to do this for me?”

“I like you,” she said quietly. “You have been good to me.”

He laughed, “Weren’t the others as well?”

“Yes,” she answered. “They all were. But I didn’t see it. And they–all of them–they loved me–you don’t–not yet.”

She went to the writing desk, took a postcard and gave it to him.

“Here is a postcard from your mother. It came earlier this evening; the servant brought it up with my mail by mistake. I read it. Your mother is ill– She very much begs you to come back to her.”

He took the postcard, stared in front of him undecided. He knew that they were right, both of them, could feel it, that it was foolishness to remain here. Then a boyish defiance seized him that screamed out, “No! No!”

“Will you go?” she asked.

He forced himself, spoke with a determined voice, “Yes, cousin!”

He looked at her sharply, watched every line of her face searching for some movement, a little tug at the corners of her mouth, a little sigh would have been enough, some something that showed him her regret. But she remained quiet and serious. No breath moved on her inflexible mask.

That vexed him, wounded him, seemed like an affront and an insult to him. He pressed his lips solidly together.

“Not like this,” he thought. “I won’t go like this.”

She came up to him, reached out her hand to him.

“Good,” she said. “Good–Now I will go. I can give you a goodbye kiss if you want.”

A sudden fire flickered in his eyes at that.

Without even wanting to, he said, “Don’t do it Alraune. Don’t do it!”

And his voice took on her own tone.

She raised her head and quickly asked, “Why not?”

Again he used her words, but she sensed that it was on purpose.

“I like you, Alraune,” he said. “You have been good to me today–many red lips have kissed my mouth–and they became very pale. Now–now, it

would be your turn. That is why it would be better if you didn’t kiss me!”

They stood facing each other; their eyes glowed hard as steel. Unnoticed, a smile played on his lips. His weapon was bright and sharp. Now she could choose. Her “No” would be his victory and her defeat–then he could go with a light heart. But her “Yes” would mean war and she felt it–the same way he did. It was like that very first evening, exactly the same, only that time was the beginning and opening round. There had still been hope for several other rounds in the duel. But now–it was the end. He was the one that had thrown the glove–

She took him up on it.

“I am not afraid,” she spoke.

He fell silent and the smile died on his lips–Now it was serious.

“I want to kiss you,” she repeated.

He said, “Be careful! I will kiss you back.”

She held his gaze–“Yes,” she said–Then she smiled.

“Sit down, you are a little too tall for me!”

“No,” he cried out loudly. “Not like that.”

He went to the wide divan, laid down on it, buried his head in the cushions, stretched his arms out wide on both sides, closed his eyes.

“Now, come Alraune!” he cried.

She stepped closer, kneeled by his hips, hesitated, looked at him, then suddenly threw herself down onto him, seized his head, pressed her lips on his. He didn’t embrace her, didn’t move his arms. But his fingers tightened into fists. He felt her tongue, the light bite of her teeth.

Kiss harder,” he whispered. “Kiss harder.”

Red fog lay before his eyes. He heard the Privy Councilor’s repulsive laugh, saw the large piercing eyes of Frau Gontram, how she begged little Manasse to explain the little alraune to her. He heard the giggling of the two celebrants, Olga and Frieda, and the broken, yet still beautiful voice of Madame de Véré singing “Les Papillons”, saw the small Hussar Lieutenant listening eagerly to the attorney, saw Karl Mohnen, as he wiped the little alraune with the large napkin–

“Kiss harder!” he murmured.

And Alma–her mother, red like a burning torch, snow-white breasts with tiny blue veins, and the execution of her father–as Uncle Jakob had described it in his leather bound volume–Out of the mouth of the princess–And the hour, in which the old man created her–and the other, in which his doctor brought her into this world–

“Kiss me,” he moaned, “Kiss me.”

He drank her kisses, sucked the hot blood from his lips, which her teeth had torn, and he became intoxicated, knowingly and intentionally, as if from champagne or his oriental narcotics–

“Enough,” he said suddenly, “enough, you don’t know what you are doing.”

At that she pressed her curls more tightly against his forehead, her kisses became hotter and more wild. Now the clear thoughts of day lay shattered, now came the dreams, swelling on a blood red ocean, now the Maenad swung her thyrsos and he frothed in the holy frenzy of Dionysus.

“Kiss me,” he screamed.

But she released him, let her arms sink. He opened his eyes, looked at her.

“Kiss me!” he repeated softly.

Her eyes glazed over, her breath came in short pants. Slowly she shook her head. At that he sprang up.

“Then I will kiss you,” he cried.

He lifted her up in his arms, threw her down struggling onto the divan, knelt down–there, right where she had knelt.

“Close your eyes,” he whispered and he bent down–

Good, his kisses were good–caressing and soft, like a harp played on a summer night, wild too, yes, and raw, like a storm wind blowing over the North sea. They burned red-hot like the fiery breath out of mount Aetna, ravishing and consuming like the vortex of a maelstrom–

“It’s pulling me under,” she felt, “pulling me into it.”

But then the spark struck and burning flames shot high into the heavens, the burning torch flew, ignited the altar, and with bloody jowls the wolf sprang into the sanctuary.

She embraced him, pressed herself tightly to his breast–I’m burning–she exalted–I’m burning–at that, he tore the clothes from her body.

The sun that woke her was high in the sky. She saw that she was lying there completely naked, but didn’t cover herself. She turned her head, saw him sitting up right next to her–naked like she was.

She asked, “Will you be leaving today?”

“Is that what you want, that I should leave?” he gave back.

“Stay,” she whispered. “Stay!”

Chapter Fifteen

Tells how Alraune lived in the park.

HE didn’t write his mother on that day, or the next, pushed it off for another week and further–for months. He lived in the large garden of the Brinkens, like he had done when he was a boy, when he had spent his school vacations there.

They sat in the warm green houses or under the mighty cedars, whose young sprouts had been brought from Lebanon by some pious ancestor, or strolled under the Mulberry trees, past a small pool that was deeply overshadowed by hanging willows.

The garden belonged to them that summer, to them alone, Alraune and him. The Fräulein had given strict orders that none of the servants were permitted to enter, not by day or by night. Not once were the gardeners called for. They were sent away into the city, charged with the maintenance of her gardens at her villas in Coblenz. The renters were very happy and amazed at the Fräulein’s attentiveness.

Only Frieda Gontram used the path. She never spoke a word about what she suspected but didn’t know. But her pinched lips and her evasive glance spoke loudly enough. She avoided meeting him on the path and yet was always there as soon as he was together with Alraune.

“What the blazes,” he grumbled. “I wish she was on top of mount Blocksberg!”

“Is she bothering you?” asked Alraune.

“Doesn’t she bother you?” he retorted.

She replied, “I haven’t noticed. I scarcely pay any attention to her.”

That evening he encountered Frieda Gontram by the blossoming blackthorns. She stood up from her bench and turned to go. Her gaze held a hot hatred.

He went up to her, “What is it Frieda?”

She said, “Nothing!–You can be satisfied now. You will soon be free of me.”

“Why is that?” he asked.

Her voice trembled, “I must go–tomorrow! Alraune told me that you didn’t want me here.”

An infinite misery spoke out of her glance.

“You wait here, Frieda. I will speak with her.”

He hurried into the house and came back after a short time.

“We have thought it over,” he began, “Alraune and I. It is not necessary that you go away–forever. Frieda, it’s only that I make you nervous with my presence–and you do the same for me, excuse me for saying it. That’s why it would be better if you go on a journey–only for awhile. Travel to Davos to visit your brother. Come back in two months.”

She stood up, looked at him with questioning eyes that were still full of fear.

“Is that the truth?” she whispered. “Only for two months?”

He answered, “Certainly it’s true. Why should I lie Frieda?”

She gripped his hand; a great joy made her face glow.

“I am very grateful to you!” she said. “Everything is alright then–as long as I am permitted to come back!”

She said, “Goodbye,” and headed for the house, stopped suddenly and came back to him.

“There is something else, Herr Doctor,” she said. “Alraune gave me a check this morning but I tore it up, because–because–in short, I tore it up. Now I will need some money. I don’t want to go to her–she would ask–and I don’t want her to ask. For that reason–will you give me the money?”

He nodded, “Naturally I will–Am I permitted to ask why you tore the check up?”

She looked at him, shrugged her shoulders.

“I wouldn’t have needed the money any more if I had to leave her forever–”

“Frieda,” he pressed, “where would you have gone?”

“Where?” A bitter laugh rang out from her thin lips. “Where? The same place Olga went! Only, believe me, doctor. I would have achieved my goal!”

She nodded lightly to him, walked away and disappeared between the birch trees.

Early, when the young sun woke him, he came out of his room in his kimono, went into the garden along the path that led past the trellis and into the rose bed. He cut white Boule de Neige roses, Queen Catharine roses, Victoria roses, Snow Queen roses and Merveille de Lyon roses. Then he turned left where the larches and the silver fir trees stood.

Alraune sat on the edge of the pool in a black silk robe, breaking breadcrumbs, throwing them to the goldfish. When he came she twined a wreath out of the pale roses, quickly and skillfully making a crown for her hair.

She threw off her robe, sat in her lace negligee and splashed in the cool water with her naked feet–She scarcely spoke, but she trembled as his

fingers lightly caressed her neck, when his soft breath caressed her cheek. Slowly she took off the negligee and laid it on the bronze mermaid beside her.

Six water nymphs sat around the marble edge of the pool pouring water out of jugs and urns, spraying thin streams out of their breasts. Various animals crept around them, giant lobsters, spiny lobsters, turtles, fish, eels and other reptiles. In the middle of the pool Triton blew his horn as chubby faced merfolk blew mighty streams of water high into the air around him.

“Come, my friend,” she said.

Then they both climbed into the water. It was very cold and he shivered, his lips became blue and goose bumps quickly appeared on his arms. He had to swim vigorously, beat his arms and tread water to warm his blood and get accustomed to the unusual temperature.

But she didn’t even notice, was in her element in an instant and laughing at him. She swam around like a little frog.

“Turn the faucet on!” she cried.

He did it. There, near the pool’s edge, by the statue of Galatea, light waves came from the water as well as three other places in the pool. They boiled up a little, growing stronger and higher, climbing higher and higher, until they became enormous sparkling cascades of silvery rain, higher than the spouting streams of the mermen.

There she stood between all four, in the middle of a shimmering rain, like a sweet boy, slender and delicate. His long glance kissed her. There was no blemish in the symmetry of her limbs, not the slightest defect in this sweet work of art. Her color was in proportion as well, like white marble with a light breath of yellow. Only the insides of her thighs showed two curious rose colored lines.

“That’s where Dr. Petersen perished,” he thought.

He bent down, kneeled and kissed the rosy places.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

He said, “ I’m thinking that you are the fairy Melusine!–See the little mermaids around us–they have no legs, only long, scaly fish tails. They have no souls, these nymphs, but it is said that sometimes they love a human, some fisherman or wandering knight.

They love him so much that they come out of the water at high tide, out onto the land. Then they go to an old witch or shaman–that brews some nasty potion they have to drink. Then the shaman takes a sharp knife and begins to cut into the fish tail. It is very painful–very painful, but Melusine suppresses her pain. Her love is so great that she doesn’t complain, doesn’t cry out, until the pain becomes so great she looses consciousness. But when she awakes–her little tail is gone and she goes about on two beautiful legs–like a human–only the scars where the shaman cut are still visible.”

“But wasn’t she always still a nymph?” she asked. “Even with human legs?–And the sorcerer could never create a soul for her.”

“No,” he said. “He couldn’t do that, but there is something else they say of nymphs.”

“What do they say?” she asked.

He explained, “She only has her strange power as long as she is untouched. When she drowns in the kisses of her lover, when she looses her maidenhood in her knight’s embrace–then she looses her magic as well. She can no longer bring river gold and treasures but the black sorrow that followed her can no longer cross her threshold either. From then on she is like any other child of man–”

“If it only was!” she whispered.

She tore the white crown from her head, swam over to the mermen and Triton, to the water nymphs and threw the rose blossoms into their laps–

“Take them, sisters–take them!” she laughed. “I am a child of man–”

An enormous canopy bed stood in Alraune’s bedroom on low, baroque columns. Two pillars grew out of the foot and bore shelves that shown with golden flames. The engraved sides showed Omphale with Hercules in a woman’s dress as he waited on her, Perseus kissing Andromeda, Hephaestus catching Ares and Aphrodite in his net–Many tendrils of vines wove themselves in between and doves played in them–along with winged cherubs. The magnificent ancient bed, heavily gilt with gold, had been brought out of Lyons by Fräulein Hortense de Monthy when she became his great-grandfather’s wife.

He saw Alraune standing on a chair at the head of the bed, a heavy pliers in her hand.

“What are you doing with that?” he asked.

She laughed, “Just wait. I will soon be finished.”

She pounded and tore, carefully enough, at the golden figurine of Amor that hovered at the head of the bed with his bow and arrow. She pulled one nail out, then another, seized the little god, twisted him this way and that–until he came loose. She grabbed him, jumped down, laid him on top of the wardrobe, took out the Alraune manikin, clambered back up onto the chair again with it and fastened it to the head of the bed with wire and twine. Then she came back down and looked critically at her work.

“How do you like it?” she asked him.

“Why should the little man be there?” he retorted.

She said, “He belongs there!–I didn’t like the golden Cupid–That is for all the other people–I want to have Galeotto, my root manikin.”

“Why do you call it that?” he asked.

“Galeotto!” she replied. “Wasn’t it him that brought us together?–Now I want him to hang there, to watch over us through the night.”

Sometimes they went out riding in the evenings or also during the night if the moon was shining. They rode through the Sieben Gerberge mountain range or to Rolandseck and into the wilderness beyond.

I want him to hang there, to watch over us through the night

Once they found a she-donkey at the foot of Dragon’s Rock in the Sieben Geberge mountain range. People there used the animal for riding up to the castle at the top. He bought her. She was a young animal, well cared for and glistened like fresh snow. Her name was Bianca. They took her with them, behind the horses on a long rope, but the animal just stood there, planting her forelegs like a stubborn mule, allowing herself to be choked and dragged along.

Finally they found a way to persuade her. In Kőnigswinter he bought a large bag full of sugar, took the rope off Bianca and let her run free. He threw her one piece of sugar after the other from out of the saddle. Soon the she-donkey ran after them, keeping itself tight to his stirrup, snuffling at his boots.

Old Froitsheim took the pipe out of his mouth as they came up, spit thoughtfully and grinned agreeably.

“An ass,” he chewed. “A young ass! It’s been almost thirty years since we’ve had one here in the stable. You know, young Master, how I used to let you ride old gray Jonathan?”

He got a bunch of carrots and gave them to the animal, stroking her shaggy fur.

“What’s her name, young Master?” he asked.

Frank Braun told him her name.

“Come Bianca,” spoke the old man. “You will have it good here with me. We will be friends.”

Then he turned again to Frank Braun.

“Young Master,” he continued. “I have three great-grandchildren in the village, two little girls and a boy. They are the cobbler’s children, on the road to Godesberg. They often come to visit me on Sunday afternoons. May I let them ride the ass?–Just here in the yard?”

He nodded, but before he could answer the Fräulein cried out:

“Why don’t you ask me, old man? It is my animal. He gave it to me!–Now I want to tell you–you are permitted to ride her–even in the gardens, when we are not home.

Frank Braun’s glance thanked her–but not the old coachman. He looked at her, half mistrusting and half surprised, grumbled something incomprehensible and enticed the donkey into the stable with the juicy carrots.

He called the stable boy, presented him to Bianca, then the horses, one after the other–led her around behind the farmyard, showed her the cow barn with the heavy Hollander cows and the young calf of black and white Liese. He showed her the hounds, both sharp pointers, the old guard dog and the cheeky fox terrier that was sleeping in the stable. Brought her to the pigs, where the enormous Yorkshire sow suckled her piglets, to the goats and the chicken coop. Bianca ate carrots and followed him. It appeared that she liked it at the Brinken’s.

Often in the afternoons the Fräulein’s clear voice rang out from the garden.

“Bianca!” she cried. “Bianca!”

Then the old coachman opened her stall; swung the door open wide and the little donkey came into the garden at an easy trot. She would stop a few times, eat the green juicy leaves, indulge in the high clover or wander around some more until the enticing call rang out again, “Bianca!” Then she would search for her mistress.

They lay on the lawn under the ash trees. No table–only a large platter lay on the grass covered with a white Damascus cloth. There were many fruits, assorted tid-bits, dainties and sweets among the roses. The wine stood to the side.

Bianca snuffled, scorned the caviar and no less the oysters, turned away from the pies. But she took some cake and a piece of ice out of the

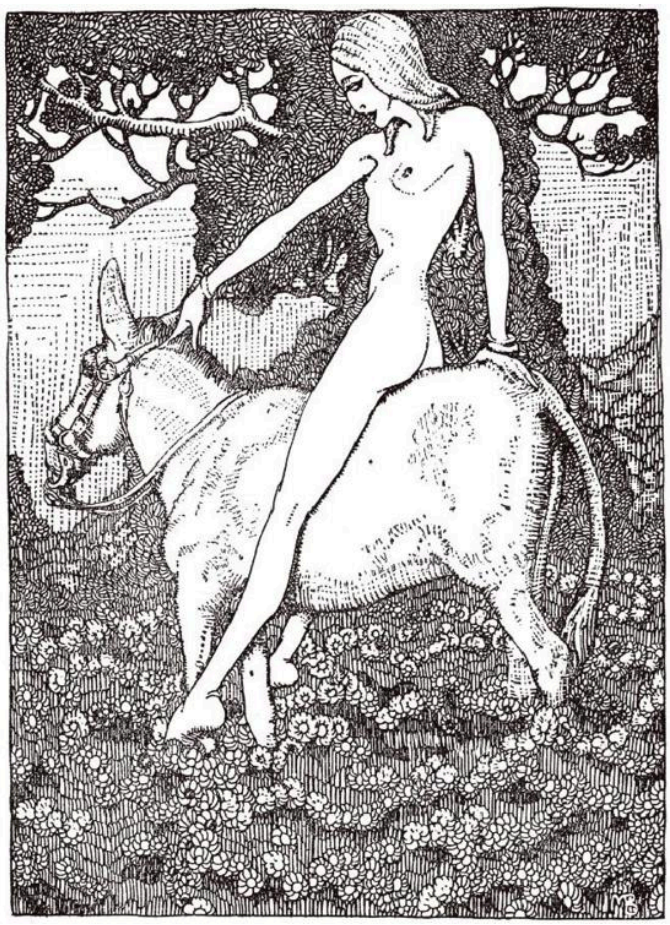
cooler, ate a couple of roses in between–

“Undress me!” said Alraune.

Then he loosened the eyes and hooks and opened the snaps. When she was naked he lifted her onto the donkey. She sat astride on the white animal’s back and held on lightly to the shaggy mane. Slowly, step by step, she strode over the meadow. He walked by her side, lying his right hand on the animal’s head. Bianca was clever, proud of the slender boy whom she carried, didn’t stop once, but went lightly with velvet hoofs.

There, where the dahlia bed ended, a narrow path led past the little brook that fed the marble pool. She didn’t go over the wooden bridge. Carefully, one foot after the other, Bianca waded through the clear water. She looked curiously to the side when a green frog jumped from the bank into the stream. He led the animal over to a raspberry patch, picked the red berries and divided them with Alraune, continued through the thick laurel bushes.

There, surrounded by thick elms, lie a large field of carnations. His grandfather had laid it out for his good friend, Gottfried Kinkel, who loved these flowers. Every week he had sent the poet a large bouquet for as long as he lived. There were little feathery carnations, tens of thousands of them, as far as the eye could see. All the flowers glowed silver-white and their leaves glowed silvery green. They gleamed far, far into the evening sun, a silver ground.



Slowly, step by step, she strode over the meadow

Bianca carried the pale girl diagonally across the field and then back around. The white donkey stepped deeply through the silver ocean; the wind made light waves that kissed her hoofs.

He stood on the border and watched her, drank in the sweet colors until he was sated. Then she rode up to him.

“Isn’t it beautiful, my love?” she asked.

And he said sincerely, “–It is very beautiful–ride some more.”

She answered, “I am happy.”

Lightly she laid her hand behind the clever animal's ears and it stepped out, slowly, slowly, through shining silver–

"Why are you laughing?" she asked.

They sat on the terrace at the breakfast table and he was reading his mail. There was a letter from Herr Manasse, who wrote him about the Burberger mining shares.

"You have read in the newspapers about the gold strike in the Hocheifel," said the attorney. For the greatest part the gold has been found on territory owned by the Burberger Association. It appears very doubtful to me that these small veins of ore will be worth the very considerable cost of refining it. Nevertheless, your shares that were completely worthless four weeks ago, now, with the help of the Association's skillful press release have rapidly climbed in value and have been at par for a week already.

Today, I heard through bank director Baller that they are prepared to quote them at two hundred fourteen. Therefore I have given your stocks over to my friend and asked him to sell them immediately. That will happen tomorrow, perhaps they will obtain an even higher rate of exchange."

He handed the letter over to Alraune.

"Uncle Jakob himself, would have never dreamed of that," he laughed. "Otherwise he would have certainly left my mother and me some different shares!"

She took the letter, carefully read it through to the end. Then she let it sink, stared straight ahead into space. Her face was wax pale.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Yes he did–He did know it," she said slowly. "He knew exactly what he was doing!"

Then she turned to him.

“If you want to make money–don’t sell the shares,” she continued and her voice rang with conviction.

“They will find still more gold–Your shares will climb still higher–much higher.”

“It’s too late,” he said lightly. “By this hour the shares have probably already been sold! Besides, are you all that certain?”

“Certain?” she repeated. “Certain? Who could be more certain that I?”

She let her head sink down onto the table, sobbed out loud, “So it begins–so–”

He stood up, laid his arm around her shoulder.

“Nonsense,” he said. “Beat that depression out of your brain!–Come Alraune, we will go swimming. The fresh water will wash the foolish cobwebs away. Chat with your mermaid sisters–they will confirm that Melusine can bring no more harm once she has kissed her lover.”

She pushed him away, sprang up, stood facing him, and looked him straight in the eyes.

“I love you,” she cried. “Yes, I do–But it is not true–the magic does not go away! I am no Melusine, am not the fresh water’s child! I come out of the earth–and the night created me.”

Shrill tones rang from her lips–and he didn’t know if it was a sob or a laugh–

He grabbed her in his strong arms, paid no attention to her struggling and hitting. He held her like a wild child, carried her down the steps and into the garden, carried her screaming over to the pool, threw her in, as far as he could with all her clothes on.

She got up and stood for a moment in amazement, dazed and confused. Then he let the cascades play and a splashing rain surrounded her. She laughed loudly at that.

“Come,” she cried. “Come in too!”

She undressed and in high spirits threw her wet clothes at his head.

“Aren’t you ready yet?” she urged. “Hurry up!”

When he was standing beside her she saw that he was bleeding. The drops fell from his cheek, from his neck and left ear.

“I bit you,” she whispered.

He nodded. Then she raised herself up high, encircled his neck, and drank the red blood with ardent lips.

“Now it is better,” she said.

They swam around–Then he went into the house, brought her a cloak. And when they turned to go back, hand in hand, under the copper beeches she said:

“I thank you, my love!”

They lay naked in the red afterglow. Their bodies, that had been one through the hot afternoon hours, fell apart–Broken and crushed by their caresses, their fondling and sweet words, like the flowers, like the tender grass, over which their love storm had broken. The firebrand lay dead, had devoured itself with greedy teeth. Out of the ashes grew a cruel, steel hard hatred.

They looked at each other–now they knew that they were mortal enemies. The long red lines on her thighs now seemed disgusting and unseemly to him, the spittle ran in his mouth as if he had sucked a bitter poison out of her lips. The little wounds that her teeth and her nails had torn hurt and burned, swelling up–

“She has poisoned me,” he thought. “Like she once did Dr. Petersen.”

Her green gaze smiled over at him, provoking, mocking and impudent. He closed his eyes, bit his lips together, and curled his fingers into fists. Then she stood up, turned around and kicked him with her foot, carelessly and contemptuously.

He sprang up at that, stood in front of her, their glances crossed–Not one word came out of her mouth, but she pouted her lips, raised her arm, spit at him, slapped him in the face with her hand.

Then he threw himself at her, shook her body, whirled her around by her hair, flung her to the ground, kicked her, beat her, choked her tightly by the neck. She defended herself well. Her nails shredded his face, her teeth bit into his arm and his chest. And with blood foaming at their mouths, their lips searched and found each other, took each other in a rutting frenzy of burning desire and pain–

Then he seized her, flung her several meters away, so that she fainted, sinking down onto the lawn. He staggered a few steps further, sank down and stared up into the blue heavens, without desire, without will–listening to his temples pound–until his eyelids sank–

When he awoke, she was kneeling at his feet, drying the blood out of his wounds with her hair, ripping her shift into long strips, bandaging him skillfully–

“Let’s go, my love,” she said. “Evening falls.”

Little blue eggshells lay on the path. He searched in the bushes, found the plundered nest of a crossbill.

“Those pesky squirrels,” he cried. “There are far too many in the park. They will drive out all of our song birds.”

“What should we do?” she asked.

He said, “Shoot a few.”

She clapped her hands.

“Yes, yes,” she laughed. “We will go on a hunt!”

“Do you have some kind of a gun?” he asked.

She considered, “No, –I believe there are none, at least none that we can use–We must buy one–But wait,” she interrupted herself, “The old coachman has one. Sometimes he shoots the stray cats when they poach.”

He went to the stables.

“Hello Froitsheim,” he cried. “Do you have a gun?”

“Yes,” replied the old man. “Should I go get it?”

He nodded, then he asked, “ Tell me old man. Do you still want to let your great-grandchildren ride on Bianca? They were here last Sunday–but I didn’t see you setting them on the donkey.”

The old man growled, went into his room, took a rifle down from the wall, came back, sat down quietly, cleaning it and getting it ready.

“Well?” he asked. “Aren’t you going to answer me?”

Froitsheim chewed with dry lips.

“I don’t want to,” he grumbled.

Frank Braun laid a hand on his shoulder, “Be reasonable old man, say what is on your heart. I think you can speak freely with me!”

Then the coachman said, “I will accept nothing from the Fräulein–don’t want any gifts from her. I receive my bread and wages–for that I work. I don’t want any more than that.”

Frank Braun felt that no persuasion would help getting through his hard skull. Then he hit upon an idea, threw in a little bait that the old man could chew on–

“If the Fräulein asked something special of you, would you do it?”

“No,” said the stubborn old man. “No more than my duty.”

“But if she paid you extra,” he continued. “Then would you do it?”

The coachman still didn’t want to agree.

“That would depend–” he chewed.

“Don’t be pig headed, Froitsheim!” laughed Frank Braun. “The Fräulein–not I–wants to borrow your gun to shoot squirrels–That has absolutely nothing to do with your duty, and because of that–do you understand, in return–she will allow you to let the children ride on the donkey–It is a trade. Will you do it?”

“Yes,” said the old man grinning. “I will.”

He handed the rifle over to him, took a box of cartridges out of a drawer.

“I will throw these in as well!” he spoke. “That way I’ve paid well and am not in her debt–Are you going out riding this afternoon, young Master?” he continued.

“Good, the horses will be ready around five-o’clock.”–Then he called the stable boy, sent him running out to the cobbler’s wife, his granddaughter, to let her know that she should send the children up that evening–

Early the next morning Frank Braun stood under the acacia that kissed the Fräulein’s window, gave his short whistle. She opened, called down that she would be right there. Her light steps rang clearly on the flagstones, with a leap she was down from the terrace, over the steps, into the garden and standing in front of him.

“Look at you!” she cried. “In a kimono? Do people go hunting like that?”

He laughed, “Well, it will do just fine for squirrels– But look at you!”

She was dressed as a Wallenstein hunter.

“Holk Regiment!” she cried. “Do you like it?”

She wore high yellow riding boots, a green jerkin and an enormous grayish green hat with waving plumes. An old pistol was stuck into her belt and a long sabre beat against her leg.

“Take that off,” he said. “The game will be terrified of you if you go hunting like that.”

She pouted her lips.

“Aren’t I pretty,” she asked.

He took her into his arms, quickly kissed her lips.

“You are charming, you vain little monkey,” he laughed. “And your Holk hunting outfit will do just as well as my kimono for squirrels.”

He unbuckled the sabre and the long spurs, laid her flintlock pistol aside and took up the coachman’s rifle.

“Now come, comrade,” he cried. “Tally ho!”

They went through the garden walking softly, peering through the bushes and into the tops of the trees. He pushed a cartridge into the rifle and cocked it.

“Have you ever shot a gun before?” he asked.

“Oh yes,” she nodded. “Wőlfchen and I went together to the big church fair in Pützchen. We practiced there in the shooting gallery.”

“Good,” he said. “Then you know how you must hold it and aim it.”

There was a rustling over them in the branches.

“Shoot,” she whispered. “Shoot! There is one above us!”

He raised the rifle and looked up, but then let it down again.

“No, not that one,” he declared. “That is a young one, scarcely a year old. We will let it live for a while longer.”

They followed the brook until it came out of the birch trees into the meadow. Fat June bugs buzzed in the sun, yellow butterflies swung over the daisies. Whispering sounds were everywhere, crickets chirping, bees buzzing, grasshoppers jumped at their feet in giant leaps. Frogs croaked in the water and above–a little lark rejoiced. They walked across the meadow to the copper beeches. There, right on the border, they heard a frightened chirping, saw a little hen flutter out of the bushes.

Frank Braun crept quietly ahead, looking sharply.

“There is the robber,” he murmured.

“Where?” she asked. “Where?”

But his shot already cracked–a heavy squirrel fell down from the tree trunk. He raised it up by the tail, showed her where the bullet had hit.

“It won’t plunder any more nests!” he said.

They hunted further through the large park. He shot a second squirrel in the honeysuckle leaves and a third gray squirrel in the top of a pear tree.

“You always shoot!” she cried. “Let me have the gun once!”

He gave it to her, showed her how to carry it, let her shoot into a tree trunk a few times.

“Now come!” he cried. “Let’s see what you can do!”

He pushed the gun barrel down.

“Like this,” he instructed. “The muzzle always points toward the ground and not into the air.”

Near the pool he saw a young animal playing in the path. She wanted to shoot right away, but he called for her to sneak up a few more steps.

“Now you’re close enough, let him have it.”

She shot–the squirrel looked around in astonishment, then quickly sprang up a tree trunk and disappeared into the thick branches. A second time didn’t go much better–She was much too far away. But when she tried to get closer, the animals fled before she could get a shot off.

“The stupid beasts,” she complained. “Why do they stand still for you?”

She appeared charming to him in her childish anger.

“Apparently because they think I am their friend,” he laughed. “You make too much noise in your leather riding boots, that’s what it is! Just wait, we will get closer.”

Right by the mansion, where the hazel bushes pressed against the acacias, he saw another squirrel.

“Stay here,” he whispered. “I will drive it out to you. Only look there into those bushes and when you see it, whistle so I will know. It will turn when you whistle–then shoot!”

He went around in a wide arc, sneaking through the bushes. Finally he discovered the animal on a low acacia, drove it down, and chased it into a hazel thicket. He saw that it was going in the right direction toward Alraune so he backed up a little and waited for her whistle. But he didn’t hear it. Then he went back in the same arc and came out on the wide path behind her. There she stood, gun in hand, staring intently into the bushes and a little off to her left–scarcely three meters away, the squirrel merrily played in the hazel thicket.

“It’s over there,” he called out softly. “Over there, up a little and to the left!”

She heard his voice, turned quickly around toward him. He saw how her lips opened to speak, heard a shot at the same time and felt a light pain in his side. Then he heard her shrill despairing scream, saw how she threw the gun away and rushed toward him. She tore open his kimono, grabbed at the wound with both hands.

He bowed his head, looked down. It was a long, but very light surface wound that was scarcely bleeding. The skin was only burned, showing a broad black line.

“Get the hangman!” he laughed. “That was close!–Right over the heart.”

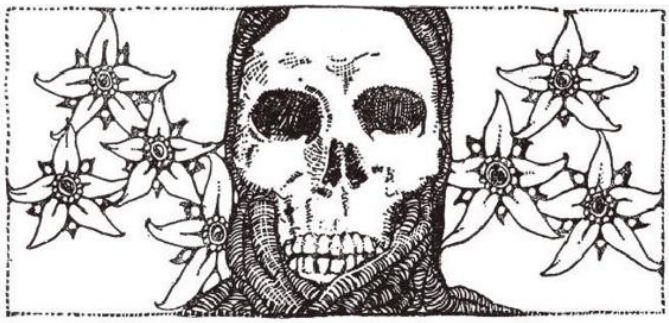
She stood in front of him, trembling, all of her limbs shaking, scarcely able to stand up. He supported her, talked to her.

“It’s nothing, child. Nothing at all! We will wash it out with something, then moisten it with oil–Think nothing of it!”

He pulled the kimono still further back, showed her his naked chest. With straying fingers she felt the surface wound.

“Right over the heart,” she murmured. “Right over the heart!”

Then suddenly she grabbed her head with both hands. A sudden fear seized her, she looked at him with a horrified gaze, tore herself out of his arms, ran to the house, sprang up the stairs–



Chapter Sixteen

Proclaims how Alraune came to an end.

HE slowly went up to his room, washed his wound, bandaged it and laughed at the girl's shooting ability.

"She will learn soon enough," he thought. "We just need a little target practice."

Then he remembered her look as she ran away. She was all broken up, full of wild despair, as if she had committed a crime. And it had only been an unlucky coincidence–which fortunately had turned out all right–He hesitated–A coincidence? Ah, that was it. She didn't take it as a coincidence–took it as–fate.

He considered–

That was certainly it. That was why she was frightened–that was why she ran away–When she looked into his eyes she saw her own image there. That's what she was afraid of–death, who scattered his flowers where ever her feet trod–

The little attorney had warned him, "Now it is your turn." Hadn't Alraune herself told him the same thing when she asked him to leave? Wasn't the old magick working on him just like it had on all the others? His uncle had left him worthless paper–Now they were digging gold out of the rocks! Alraune brought riches–and she brought death.

Suddenly he was frightened–now for the first time. He bared his wound once again–Oh yes, there it was. His heart beat right under the tear. It had only been the little movement of his body as he turned, as he pointed to the squirrel with his arm that had saved him. Otherwise–otherwise–

No, he didn’t want to die, especially right now because of his mother, he thought. Yes, because of her–but even if she wasn’t there, he wanted to live for himself as well. It had taken many long years to learn how to live, but now he had mastered that great art, which now gave him more than many thousands of others. He lived fully and strongly, stood on the summit and really enjoyed the world and all of its delights.

“Fate loves me,” he thought. “It’s pointing with its finger–much more clearly than the words of the attorney. There is still time.”

He pulled out his suitcase, tore the lid open and began to pack–How had Uncle Jakob ended his leather bound volume?

“Try your luck! It’s too bad that I won’t be there when your turn comes. I would have dearly loved to see it.”

He shook his head.

“No, Uncle Jakob,” he murmured. “You will get no satisfaction out of me this time, not this time.”

He threw his boots together, grabbed a pair of stockings, and laid out a shirt and suit that he wanted to wear. His glance fell on the deep blue kimono that hung over the back of a chair. He picked it up, contemplated the scorched hole that the bullet had made.

“I should leave it here,” he said. “A momento for Alraune. She can put it with the other momentos.”

A deep sigh sounded behind him. He turned around–She stood in the middle of the room, in a thin silk negligee, looking at him with large open eyes.

“You are packing?” she whispered. “You are leaving–I thought so.”

A lump rose in his throat but he choked it back down and pulled himself together.

“Yes, Alraune, I’m going on a journey,” he said.

She threw herself down onto a chair, didn’t answer, just looked at him quietly. He went to the wash basin, took up one thing after another, comb, brush, soap and sponge. Finally he threw the lid shut and locked the suitcase.

“Well,” he said forcefully. “Now I’m ready.”

He stepped up to her, reached out his hand. She didn’t move, didn’t raise her arm and her pale lips remained shut. Only her eyes spoke.

“Don’t go,” they pleaded. “Don’t leave me. Stay with me.”

“Alraune,” he murmured and it sounded like a reproach, like a plea even, to let him go.

But she didn’t let him go, held him solidly with her eyes, “Don’t leave me.”

It felt like his will was melting and he forcefully turned his eyes away from her. But then her lips moved.

“Don’t go,” she insisted. “Stay with me.”

“No,” he screamed. “I don’t want to. You will put me in the ground like all the others!”

He turned his back on her, went to the table, and tore a couple pieces of cotton from the bandage wadding that he had brought for his wound. He moistened them with oil and plugged them solidly into his ears.

“Now you can talk,” he cried. “If you like. I can’t hear you. I can’t see you–I must go and you know it. Let me go.”

She softly said, “Then you will feel me.”

She stepped up to him, lightly laid her hand on his arm and her fingers trembled and spoke – “Stay with me!–Don’t abandon me.”

The light kiss of her little hands was so sweet, so sweet.

“I will tear myself loose,” he thought, “soon, just one second longer.”

He closed his eyes, and with a deep breath savored the caressing touch of her fingers. Then she raised her hands and his cheeks trembled under their gentle touch. She slowly brought her arms around his neck, bent his head down, raised herself up and brought her moist lips to his mouth.

“How strange it is,” he thought. “Her nerves speak and mine understand their language.”

She pulled him one step to the side, pressed him down onto the bed, sat down on his knees and wrapped him in a cloak of tender caresses. With slender fingers she pulled the cotton out of his ears and whispered sultry, loving words to him. He didn’t understand because she spoke so softly, but he sensed the meaning, felt that she was no longer saying, “Stay!”–That now she was saying, “I’m so glad that you are staying.”

He kept his eyelids tightly shut over his eyes, yet now he only heard her lips whisper sweet nothings, only felt the tips of her little fingers as they ran across his breast and his face. She didn’t pull him, didn’t urge him–and yet he felt the streaming of her nerves pulling him down onto the bed. Slowly, slowly, he let himself sink.

Then suddenly she sprang up. He opened his eyes, saw her run to the door and shut it, then to the window and tightly close the heavy curtains. A dim twilight still flowed through the room. He wanted to rise, to stand up, but she was back before he could move a single limb. She threw off the black negligee and came to him, shut his eyelids again with gentle fingers and pressed her lips on his.

He felt her little breast in his hand, felt her toe nails play against the flesh of his legs, felt her hair falling over his cheeks–and he didn’t resist, gave himself to her, just as she wanted–

“Are you staying?” she asked.

But he sensed it wasn’t a question any more, she only wanted to hear it from his own lips.

“Yes,” he said softly.

Her kisses fell like the rain in May. Her caresses dropped like a shower of almond blossoms in the evening wind and her loving words sprang like the shimering pearls of the cascade in the park pool.

“You taught me!” she breathed. “You–you showed me what love is–Now you must stay for my love, which you created!”

She lightly traced her fingers over his wound, kissed it with her tongue, raised her head and looked at him with crazy, confused eyes.

“I hurt you–”she whispered. “I struck you–right over your heart–Do you want to beat me? Should I get the whip? Do what you want!–Tear wounds in me with your teeth–take a knife even. Drink my blood–Do whatever you want–Anything, anything–I am your slave.”

He closed his eyes again and sighed deeply.

“You are the Mistress,” he thought. “The winner!”

Sometimes when he entered the library it seemed as if a laugh came from out of the corners somewhere. The first time he heard it he thought it was Alraune, even though it didn’t sound like her voice. He searched around and found nothing. When he heard it again he became frightened.

“That’s Uncle Jakob’s hoarse voice,” he thought. “He is laughing at me.”

Then he took hold of himself, pulled himself together.

“A hallucination,” he muttered. “And no wonder–my nerves are over stimulated.”

He moved about as if in a dream, slouching and staggering, with hanging, drooping movements and listless eyes. But every nerve was taut and overloaded when he was with her–Then his blood raced, where before it had been sickly and barely crawled.

He had been her teacher, that was true. He had opened her eyes, taught her every Persian mystery from the land of the morning, every game of the ancients that had made love into a fine art. But it was as if he said nothing strange to her at all, only reawakened her long lost memories from some other time. Often her swift desire flamed and broke out like a forest fire in the summer time before he could even speak. He threw the torch and yet shuddered at the rutting fire that scorched his flesh, engulfed him in feverish passion, left him withered and curdled the blood in his veins.

Once as he slunk over the courtyard he met Froitsheim.

“You don’t ride any more, young Master?” asked the old coachman.

He quickly said, “No, not any more.”

Then his gaze met the old man’s and he saw how the dry lips opened.

“Don’t speak, old man!” he said quickly. “I know what you want to say to me! But I can’t–I can’t.”

The coachman watched for a long time as Frank Braun went into the garden, spit, thoughtfully shook his head, then crossed himself.

One evening Frieda Gontram sat on the stone bench under the copper beeches. He stepped up to her and offered his hand.

“Back already Frieda?”

“The two months are gone,” she said.

He put his hand to his forehead.

“Gone,” he murmured. “It scarcely seems like a week to me. How goes it with your brother?” he continued.

“He is dead,” she replied, “for a long time now. Vicar Schrőder and I buried him up there, in Davos.”

“Dead,” he responded.

Then as if to chase the thought away he quickly asked, “What else is new out there? We live like hermits, never go out of the garden.”

“The princess died of a stroke,” she began. “Countess Olga– ”

But he didn’t let her continue.

“No, no,” he cried. “Say nothing. I don’t want to hear. Death, death and more death–Be quiet Frieda, be quiet!”

Now he was happy that she was there. They spoke very little to each other, but they sat together quietly, secretly, when the Fräulein was in the house. Alraune resented that Frieda Gontram was back.

“Why did she come? I won’t have it! I want no one here except you.”

“Let her be,” he said. “She is not in the way, hides herself whenever she can.”

Alraune said, “She is together with you when I’m not there. I know it. She better be careful!”

“What will you do?” he asked.

She answered, “Do? Nothing! Have you forgotten that I don’t need to do anything? It all happens by itself.”

Once again resistance awoke in him.

“You are dangerous,” he said. “Like a poisonous berry.”

She raised her lips, “Why does she nibble then? I ordered her to stay away forever!–But you changed it to two months. It is your fault.”

“No,” he cried. “That is not true. She would have drown herself–”

“So much the better!” laughed Alraune.

He bit his teeth together, grabbed her arms and shook her.

“You are a witch!” he hissed. “Someone should kill you.”

She didn’t defend herself, even when his fingers pressed deeply into her flesh.

“Who?” she laughed. “You?”

“Yes me!” he screamed. “Me! I planted the seed of this poisonous tree–so I am the one to find an axe and chop it down–to free the world of you!”

“Do it,” she piped gently. “Do it, Frank Braun!”

Her mockery flowed like oil on the fire that burned in him. Haze rose hot and red in front of his eyes, pressed stuffily into his mouth. His features became distorted. He quickly let go of her and raised his clenched fists.

“Hit me,” she cried. “Hit me! I want you to!”

At that his arms sank, his poor will drown in the flood of her caresses.

That night he awoke. A flickering light fell on him coming from the large silver candlestick that stood on the fireplace. He lay on his great-grandmother’s mighty bed. Over him, directly over him, the little wooden man was suspended.

“If it falls, it will kill me,” he thought half-asleep. “I must take it down.”

Then his gaze fell to the foot of the bed. There crouched Alraune, soft words sounded from her mouth, something rattled lightly in her hands. He turned his head a little and peered over at her. She held the dice cup–her mother’s skull. Threw the dice–her father’s bones.

“Nine,” she muttered, “and seven–sixteen!”

Again she put the bone dice in the skull dice cup, shook it noisily back and forth.

“Eleven,” she cried.

“What are you doing?” he interrupted.

She turned around, “I’m playing. I couldn’t go to sleep–so I’m playing.”

“What are you playing?” he asked.

She glided over to him, quickly, like a smooth little snake.

“I’m playing ‘How it will be’, How it will be–with you and with Frieda Gontram!”

“Well–and how will it be?” he asked again.

She drummed with her fingers on his chest.

“She will die,” she twittered. “Frieda Gontram will die.”

“When,” he pressed.

“I don’t know,” she spoke. “Soon, very soon!”

He tightened his fingers together, “Well – and how about me?”

She said, “I don’t know. You interrupted me. Should I continue to play?”

“No,” he cried. “No! I don’t want to know!”

He fell silent, brooding heavily, then startled suddenly, sat up and stared at the door. Light steps shuffled past. Very distinctly he heard the floorboards creak. He sprang out of bed, took a couple steps to the door and listened intently. Now they were gliding up the stairs. Then he heard her clear laughter behind him.

“Let her be!” she tinkled. “What do you want from her?”

“Why should I leave it alone?” he asked. “Who is it?”

She laughed even more, “Who? Frieda Gontram! Your fear is too early, my knight! She still lives!”

He came back, sat on the edge of the bed.

“Bring me some wine!” he cried. “I want something to drink!”

She sprang up, ran into the next room, brought the crystal carafe, let the burgundy bleed into the polished goblets.

“She always runs around,” Alraune explained, “day and night. She says she can’t sleep, so she climbs through the entire house.”

He didn’t hear what she was saying, gulped the wine down and reached the goblet out to her again.

“More,” he demanded. “Give me more!”

“No,” she said. “Not like that! Lay back down. You will drink from me if you are thirsty.”

She pressed his head down onto the pillows, kneeled in front of him on the floor, took a sip of wine and gave it to him in her mouth. He became drunk from the wine, even more drunk from the lips that reached out to him.

The sun burned at noon. They sat on the marble edge of the pool and splashed in the water with their feet.

“Go into my room,” she said. “On my dresser is a hook, on the left hand side. Bring it to me.”

“No,” he replied. “You shouldn’t fish. What would you do with the little goldfish?”

“Do it!” she spoke.

He stood up and went into the mansion. He went into her room, picked up the hook and examined it critically. Then he smiled in satisfaction.

“Well, she won’t catch many with this thing here!” But then he interrupted himself.

Heavy lines creased his forehead, “Not catch many? She would catch goldfish even if she threw in a meat hook!”

His glance fell on the bed, then up to the little root man. He threw the hook into the corner and grabbed a chair in sudden resolve. He placed it by the bed, climbed up and with a quick pull tore the little alraune down. He gathered some paper together, threw it into the fireplace, lit it and laid the little man on top.

He sat down on the floor watching the flames. But they only devoured the paper, didn’t even singe the alraune, only blackened it. And it seemed to him that it laughed, as if its ugly face pulled into a grimace–yes, into Uncle Jakob’s grin! And then–then the phlemy laugh sounded again–echoed from the corners.

He sprang up, took his knife from the table, opened the sharp blade and grabbed the little man from out of the fire. The wooden root was hard and infinitely tough. He was only able to remove little splinters, but he didn’t give up. He cut and cut, one little piece after the other. Bright beads of sweat pearled on his forehead and his fingers hurt from the unaccustomed work. He paused, took some fresh paper, stacks of never read newspapers, threw the splinters on them, sprinkled them with rose oil and Eau de Cologne.

Ah, now it burned, blazed, and the flames doubled his strength. Faster and stronger, he removed more slivers from the wood, always giving new nourishment to the fire. The little man became smaller, lost its arms and both legs. Yet it never gave up, defended itself, the point of a splinter stuck deeply into his finger. But he smeared the ugly head with his blood, grinned, laughed and cut new slivers from its body.

Then her voice rang, hoarse, almost broken.

“What are you doing?” she cried.

He sprang up, threw the last piece into the devouring flames. He turned around and a wild, insane gleam showed in his green eyes.

“I’ve killed it!” he screamed.

“Me,” she moaned, “Me!”

She grabbed at her breast with both hands.

“It hurts,” she whispered. “It hurts.”

He walked past her, slammed the door shut–Yet an hour later he lay again in her arms, greedily drinking her poisonous kisses.

It was true–He had been her teacher. By his hand they had wandered through the park of love, deep onto the hidden path far from broad avenues of the masses. But where the path ended in thick underbrush he turned around, turned back from the steep abyss. There she walked on laughing, untroubled and free of all fear or shyness. She skipped in light easy dance steps. There was no red poisonous fruit that grew in the park of love that her fingers did not pluck, her smiling lips did not taste–

She learned from him how sweet the intoxication was when the tongue sipped little drops of blood from the flesh of the lover. But her desire was insatiable and her burning thirst unquenchable.

He was exhausted from her kisses that night, slowly untangled himself from her limbs, closed his eyes and lay like a dead man, rigid and unmoving. But he didn’t sleep. His senses remained clear and awake despite his weariness. He lay like that for long hours.

The bright light of the full moon fell through the open window onto the white bed. He heard how she stirred at his side, softly moaned and whispered senseless words like she always did on such full moon nights.

He heard her stand up, go singing to the window, then slowly come back, felt how she bent over him and stared at him for a long time. He

didn’t move. Again she stood up, ran to the table and came back. She blew quickly on his left breast, then once more and waited, listening to his breathing. Then he felt something cold and sharp slice through his skin and realized it was a knife.

“Now she will thrust it,” he thought.

But that didn’t seem painful to him. It seemed sweet and even good. He didn’t move and waited quietly for the quick thrust that would open his heart. She cut slowly and lightly. Not very deep–but deep enough that his hot blood welled up. He heard her quick breath, opened his eyelids a little and looked up at her. Her lips were half-open, the tip of her little tongue greedily pushed itself out between her even teeth. Her small white breasts raised themselves quickly and an insane fire shone out of her staring green eyes.

Then suddenly she threw herself over him, pressed her mouth to the open wound, drank–drank. He lay there quietly, felt how the blood flowed from his heart. It seemed to him as if she was drinking him dry, sucking all of his blood, not leaving him a single drop.

And she drank–drank–through an eternity she drank–

Finally she raised her head. He saw how she glowed, her cheeks shone red in the moonlight, and little drops of sweat pearled on her forehead. With caressing fingers she once more tasted the red refreshment from the exhausted well, then lightly pressed a few light kisses on it, turned and looked with staring eyes into the moon–

There was something that pulled her. She stood up, went with heavy steps to the window, climbed onto a chair, and set one foot on the windowsill–awash with silvery moonlight.

Then, as if with sudden resolve, she climbed down again, didn’t look to the right or to the left, glided straight through the room.

“I’m coming,” she whispered. “I’m coming.”

She opened the door and went out.

He lay there quietly for awhile listening to the steps of the sleepwalker until they lost themselves somewhere in some distant room. Then he stood up, put on his socks and shoes and grabbed his robe. He was happy that she was gone. Now he could get a little sleep. He had to leave, leave now – before she came back.

He crossed the hall and headed toward his room, then heard her footsteps and pressed himself tightly into a doorway. But it was a black figure, Frieda Gontram in her garb of mourning. She carried a lit candle in her hand as she always did on her nightly strolls despite the light of the full moon.

He saw her pale, distorted features, the hard lines that crossed her nose, her thin pinched mouth, and her frightened, averted eyes.

“She was possessed,” he thought, “possessed just like he was.”

For a moment he considered speaking to her, to find out if–if perhaps– But he shook his head, no, no. It wouldn’t help. She blocked the way to his room, so he decided to go across to the library and lay down there on the divan. He sneaked down the stairs, came to the house door, slid back the bolt and unhooked the chain. Then he quietly slipped outside and went out across the courtyard.

The Iron Gate stood wide open as if it were day. That surprised him and he went through it out onto the street. The niche of the Saint lay in deep shadows but the white stone statue shown brighter than usual. Many flowers lay at his feet. Four, five little lanterns burned between them and it seemed to him as if those little flames the people brought, which they called eternal lamps, wanted to do battle against the light of the moon.

“Paltry little lanterns,” he murmured.

But they helped him, were like a protection against the cruel, unfathomable forces of nature. He felt safe in the shadows near the Saint where the moon’s own light didn’t penetrate, where the Saint’s own fires

burned. He looked up at the hard features of the statue and it seemed to him as if they lived in the flickering light of the lanterns. It seemed as if the Saint extended himself, grew taller, and looked proudly out to where the moon was shining. Then he sang, lightly humming as he had many years ago, but this time ardently, almost fervently.

John of Nepomuk

Protector against floods

Protect me from love!

Let it strike another.

Leave me in earthly peace

John of Nepomuk

Protect me from love.

Then he went back through the gate and across the courtyard. The old coachman sat on the stone bench in front of the stables. He saw him raise his arm and wave to him and he hurried across the flagstones.

“What is it old man?” he whispered.

Froitsheim didn’t answer, just raised his hand, pointing upward with his short pipe.

“What?” he asked. “Where?”

But then he saw. On the high roof of the mansion a slender, naked boy was walking, quietly and confidently. It was Alraune. Her eyes were wide open, looking upward, high above at the full moon. He saw her lips move, saw how she reached her arms up into the starry night. It was like a request, like a burning desire.

She kept moving, first on the ridge of the roof, then walking along the eaves, step by step. She would fall, was going to fall! A sudden fear seized him, his lips opened to warn her, to call out to her.

“Alr–”

He saw her lips move, saw how she reached her arms up into the starry night.

But he stifled the cry. To warn her, to call her name–that would mean her death! She was asleep, was safe–as long as she slept and wandered in

her sleep. But if he cried out to her, if she woke up–then, then she would fall down!

Something inside him demanded, “Call out! Then you will be saved. Just one little word, just her name–Alraune! You carry her life on the tip of your tongue and your own as well! Call out! Call out!”

His teeth clenched together, his eyes closed; he clasped his hands tightly together. But he sensed that it had to happen now, right now. There was no going back; he had to do it! All his thoughts fused together forming themselves into one long, sharp, murderous dagger, “Alraune–”

Then a clear, shrill, wild and despairing cry sounded out through the night–“Alraune–Alraune!”

He tore his eyes open, stared upward. He saw how she let her raised arms drop, how a sudden shudder went through her limbs, how she turned and looked back terrified at the large black figure that crept out of the dormer window. He saw how Frieda Gontram opened her arms wide and stumbled forward–heard once more her frightened cry,

“Alraune”.

Then he saw nothing more. A whirling fog covered his eyes; he only heard a hollow thud and then a second one right after it. Then he heard a weak, clear cry, only one. The old coachman grabbed his arm and pulled him up. He swayed, almost fell–then sprang up and ran with quick steps across the courtyard, toward the house.

He knelt at her side, cradled her sweet body in his arms. Blood, so much blood covered the short curls. He laid his ear to her heart and heard a faint beating.

“She still lives,” he whispered. “Oh, she still lives.”

He kissed her pale forehead. He looked over to the side where the old coachman was examining Frieda Gontram. He saw him shake his head and stand up with difficulty.

“Her neck is broken,” he said.

What was that to him? Alraune still lived–she lived.

“Come old man,” he cried. “We will carry her inside.”

He raised her shoulders a little–then she opened her eyes, but she didn’t recognize him.

“I’m coming,” she whispered. “I’m coming–”

Then her head fell back–

He sprang up. His sudden, raging and wild scream echoed from the houses and flowed with many voices across the garden.

“Alraune, Alraune! It was me–I did it!”

The old coachman laid a gnarled hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

“No, young Master,” he said. “Fräulein Gontram called out to her.”

He laughed shrilly, “But I wanted to.”

The old face became dark, his voice rang harshly, “I wanted to.”

The servants came out of their houses, came with lights and with noise, screaming and talking until they filled the entire courtyard. Staggering like a drunk he swayed toward the house, supporting himself on the old man’s arm.

“I want to go home,” he whispered. “Mother is waiting.”

Finale

It is late in the summer, the hollyhocks now raise their heads away from the stalks. The mallows scatter their dull tones in tired colors, pale yellow, lilac and soft pink. When you knocked my love, the spring was young. When you entered through the narrow gate into my dream garden the swift little swallows were singing their welcome to the daffodils and the yellow primrose.

Your eyes were blue and kind and your days were like heavy clusters of light blue wisteria dropping down to form a soft carpet. My feet walked lightly there through the sun glistening pathways of your arbor–Then the shadows fell and in the night eternal sin climbed out of the ocean, coming here from the south, created out of the glowing fires of the desert sands.

She spewed forth her pestilent breath in my garden strewing her rutting passion beneath her veil of beauty. Wild sister, that's when your hot soul awoke, shameless, full of every poison. You drank my blood, exulted and screamed out from painful tortures and from passionate kisses.

Your marvelous sweet nails that your little maid, Fanny, manicured grew into wild claws. Your smooth teeth, glowing like milky opals, grew into mighty fangs. Your sweet childish breasts, little snow-white kittens, turned into the rigid tits of a murderous whore. Your golden curls hissed like impassioned vipers and the lightning that unleashed all madness reposed in your soft jeweled eyes which caught the light like the glowing sapphire in the forehead of my golden Buddha.

But gold lotus grew in the pool of my soul, extended themselves with broad leaves upon the vast shallows and covered the deep horrors of the whirling maelstrom. The silver tears that the clouds wept lay like large pearls upon their green leaves, shining through the afternoons like polished moonstones.

Where the acacia's pale snow once lay the laburnum now throws its poisonous yellows–There, little sister, I found the great beauty of your chaste sins and I understood the pleasures of the saints.

I sat in front of the mirror, my love, drank out of it the over abundance of your sins while you slept on summer afternoons, in your thin silk shift on white linen. You were a different person, my dear, when the sun laughed in the splendor of my garden–sweet little sister of my dream filled days. You were an entirely different person, my dear, when it sank into the sea, when the horrors of darkness softly crept out of the bushes–wild, sinful sister of my passionate nights–But I could see by the light of day all the sins of the night in your naked beauty.

Understanding came to me from out of the mirror, the ancient gold framed mirror, which saw so many games of love in that wide turret room in the castle of San Costanzo. The truth, which I had only glimpsed in the pages of the leather bound volume, came to me from out of that mirror. Sweetest of all are the chaste sins of the innocent.

That there are creatures–not animal–strange creatures, that originate out of villainous desires and absurd thoughts–that you will not deny, my love, not you.

Good is the law; good are all the strict rules. Good is the God that created them and good is the man that carefully observes them.

But there is the child of Satan who with arrogant hands brazenly rips the eternal laws from their appointed place. The Evil One, who is a mighty Lord, helps him–that he might create out of his own proud will–against all nature.

His work towers into the heavens– nd yet falls apart and in its collapse buries the arrogant fool that conceived it–

Now I write this for you, sister, this book–I ripped open old, long forgotten scars, mixed their dark blood with the bright and fresh blood of my latest torments. Beautiful flowers grow out of such soil, fertilized by blood.

All that I have told you, my love, is very true–yet I take it from the mirror, drink out of its glass the realizations of my latest experiences and apply them to earlier memories and original events.

Take this book sister. Take it from a wild adventurer who was an arrogant fool–and a quiet dreamer as well–Take if from one, little sister, that has run closely alongside such a life–

Miramar–Lesina–Brion

April–October 1911

The End

Table of Contents

Galeotto
Arsis
Chapter 1
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Intermezzo
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve
Chapter Thirteen
Chapter Fourteen
Chapter Fifteen
Chapter Sixteen
Finale